

GMR

GET MORE FROM YOUR GAM

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FIRST-PERSON XBOX ACTION!

RAINBOW SIX 3

SMOKE 'EM IF YOU SPOT 'EM!

Knock-knock! Who's there?

Flash. Flash who?

Flashbang!!! Yeeeeearrrghhhh!

PAGE 47 // HOW // TECMO // XBOX REVIEW

WORLD-EXCLUSIVE XBOX REVIEW!

NINJA GAIDEN

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REVIEW: THE MOST FUN YOU CAN HAVE IN THE ENTIRE UNIVERSE! P.49

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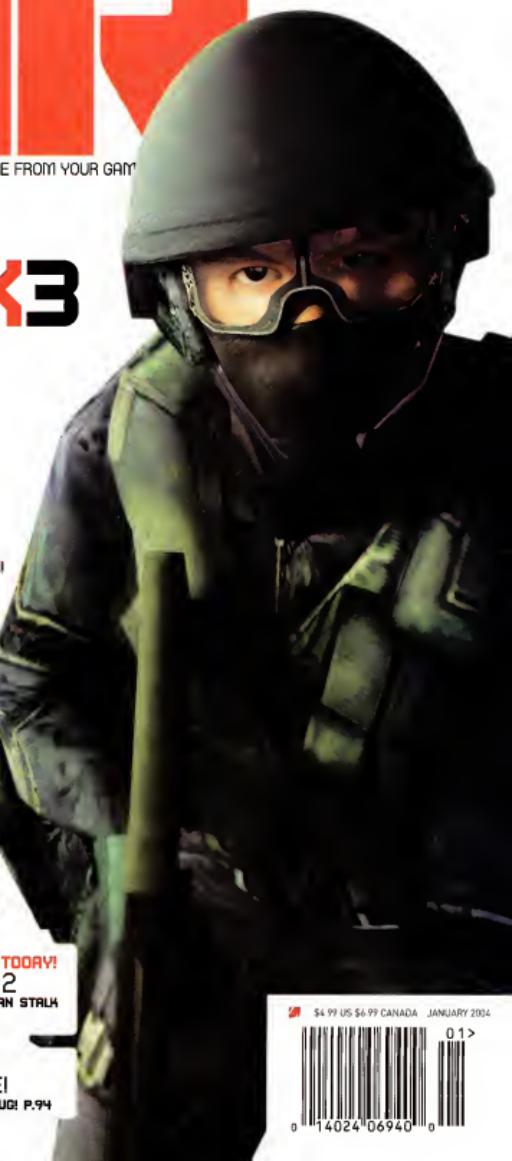
SPIDER CELL 2

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STOP! DON'T LEAVE HOME WITHOUT...

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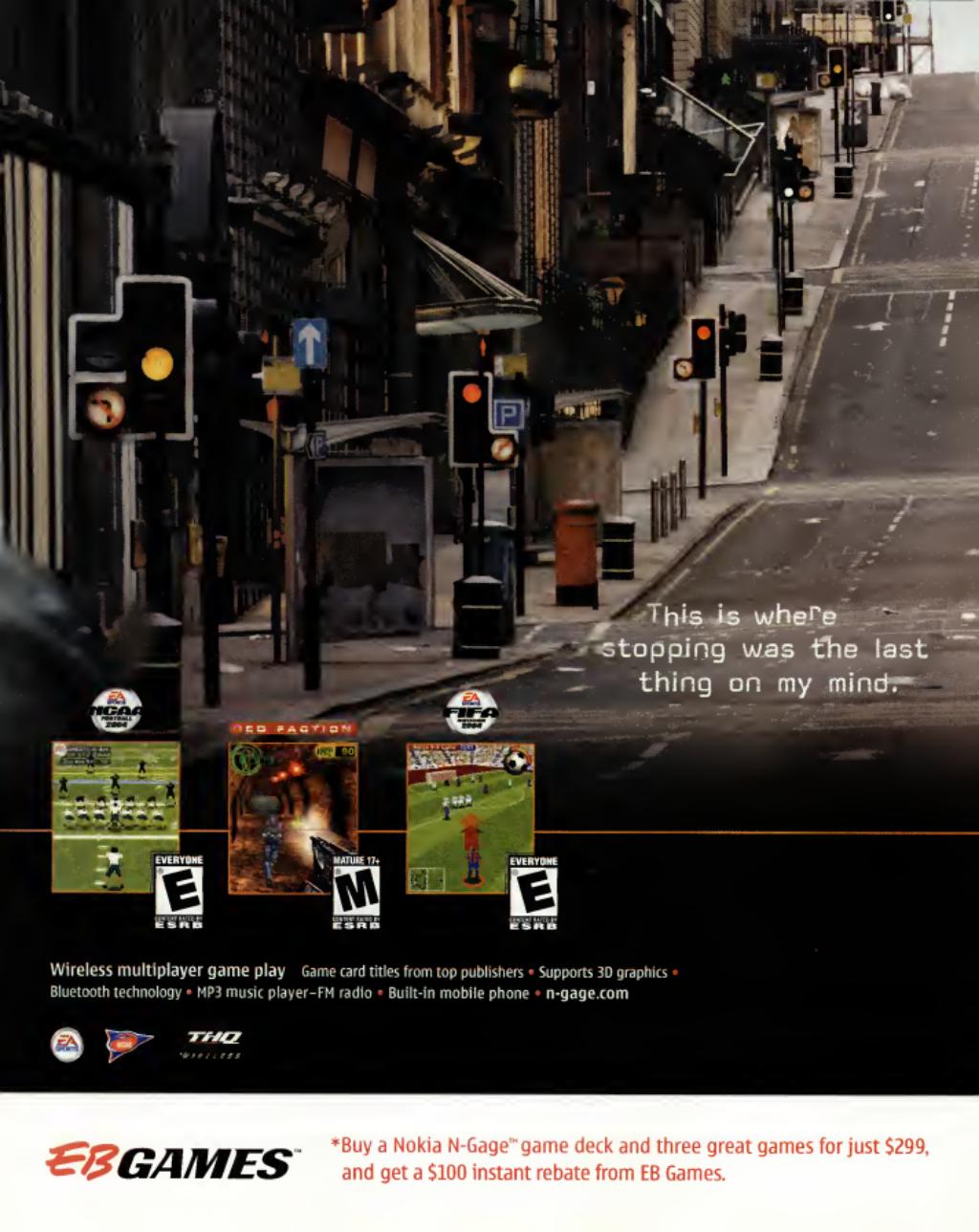


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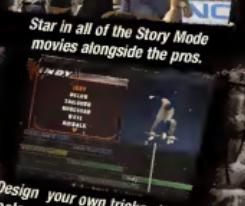
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"5 out of 5"

— Maxim Magazine

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— Official PlayStation 2 Magazine [U.K.]

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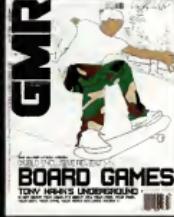
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GMR

GET MORE FROM YOUR GAMES

→ GMR is 1 year old today. A precious child, even at this early age, the magazine is already walking unassisted and has recently said its first word (a popular euphemism that we have been advised by legal council not to repeat in print). It's somewhat customary on these occasions to bust out the photo album, pop the champagne corks (our bosses may even spring for the bottle next year), and bore everyone to death with remembrances of things past.

The day always brought his ferret into work and it accidentally ate Gerry, for example. Or the time Tom beat up Michael's Ed Fries on the 18th hole at Pebble Beach because "he looks sort of smug." Then there was that time with David when he woke up in the middle of deadline to find the whole staff had turned into moths. And who could forget the moment when Pfister, dangling on the edge of a thousand-foot drop down an asphalt in Cloud City, discovered that Simon was, in fact, his uncle. And finally, the day Caroline revealed to the team that she'd had "enough of the donkey" and was leaving to work at a proper magazine like *EW*, or *Comics*, or *EGM*. Good times, all.

And what of the contents of this birthday issue? No less than 52 reviews, including the first-ever, world-exclusive, in-depth Japanese review of Tecmo's *Ninja Gaiden* and a not at all exclusive, but still sort of interesting *Rainbow Six 3* review that almost killed Pfister. We also worked hard to bring you the first ever Game Gezer's Holiday Gift Guide! The old windbag selects the best games for every system, as well as the best creams for clearing up a multitude of ailments that can make sitting down a bit tricky.

All that remains to be said is this: thanks for your support. Without you, GMR would be a website.

See you next year.
Simon Cox, Editor-in-Chief



RED COAT



FILE NAME: SIMON COX
PRIMARY SPECIALTY: EDITOR-IN-CHIEF
BIRTHPLACE: KETTERING, U.K.

Word from the top is that Red Coat is actually a double agent for her Majesty's Secret Service. That pretty face of his might not have seen much time on the battlefield, but he's a capable leader and a true master of needlessly intercepting the word "erms."

FROSTED FLAKE



FILE NAME: JAMES MIELKE
PRIMARY SPECIALTY: EXECUTIVE EDITOR
BIRTHPLACE: THE NORTH POLE

"What's cooler than being cold?" Before dispensing a spray of icy coldness on shadowy enemies or Frosty, as he's known to his friends, you'd better know who's who. Who's who? The source of his icy, infinite cruelty? His bladder has been frozen solid for years...

STONE SHADOW



FILE NAME: DAVID CHEN
PRIMARY SPECIALTY: MANAGING EDITOR
BIRTHPLACE: ANN ARBOR, MI

Thanks to extensive training in the darker martial arts and "mental conditioning" that would parallel most, Stone Shadow is one of the most dangerous assassins in the world. Easily distracted by pork sandwiches and the "toy of war," he's also one of the least reliable.

COL. CRANKY



FILE NAME: TOM PRICE
PRIMARY SPECIALTY: NEWS EDITOR
BIRTHPLACE: SAN BERNARDINO, CA

Losing all the skin—and most of the hair—from his body in a freak fuselage accident, the Colonel's evil titanium exterior belies the softy within. According to recons, his eye patch has nothing to do with a missing eye; it's worn in honor of TLC's *Left Eye* Lopez.

VELVET FIST



FILE NAME: ANDREW PFISTER
PRIMARY SPECIALTY: WRITER
BIRTHPLACE: SHEBOYGAN, WI

Also known as the "Gentle Giant" or the "Fist of Love," this devil-may-care loner is always first to volunteer for suicide missions. After a list from memory every day on TV shows like *Daytona 500*, he's also primed for his Intel-gathering capabilities.

POTATO PEELER



FILE NAME: GERRY SERRANO
PRIMARY SPECIALTY: ART DIRECTOR
BIRTHPLACE: LEGAZPI CITY, PHILIPPINES

Others may make up the heart and soul of the G.I. GMR, but Gerry's the one that makes the body move. His hands always empty for Sunday's showed "surprise," but when Gerry's brandishing his trademark potato peeler and spud gun, he's crazy—like a pit bull.

BLUE EYES



FILE NAME: CAROLINE KING
PRIMARY SPECIALTY: DESIGNER
BIRTHPLACE: WALNUT CREEK, CA

Of Blue Eyes is the Queen Bee of killing with kindness. And tick-filled miffins. She wields a customized serrated katana to ease in the dismembering of enemies. And because you never know when you might find baked goods on the field,

GMR

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Tom Price: News Editor

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Achtung!

Hauptmann - Ihr Flugzeug brennt*



(Translation: Hey, Captain! Your airplane's on fire.)

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PlayStation 2



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FREEDOM ISN'T FREE

Foreign Ambassadors Report Peaceful Face-to-Face Negotiations with Terrorists in Venezuela

By Michael Golden
GLOBAL PRESS NETWORK

was relieved that the situation did not turn violent despite the heightened tensions between the two sides. As of yet,



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Tom Clancy's RAINBOW SIX 3



UBISOFT

POST

YOU READ. YOU WRITE. WE READ. WE WRITE BACK. IT'S ALL QUITE SYMBIOTIC. REALLY.

SOMETIMES PEOPLE JUST SUCK

Why didn't Dreamcast sell? I went to my local EB and bought one for 30 bucks, plus all these other promotions. When I got home and turned it on, I was amazed at the graphics! They compared with PS2! I don't know why such a great graphics system would go down the tubes. I now have about 20 Dreamcast games—including *Soul Calibur*; *Shenmue*; *Crazy Taxi*, 1, 2, and 3, and *Phantasy Star Online* 1 and 2—and I play them a lot. They range from \$2.99 to \$19.99, so buying these games is a cheap hobby. I feel bad for the many people who have never played these awesome games. When it came out in 2000, the graphics must've stunned people. SO WHAT HAPPENED TO MY NDW-FAVORITE SYSTEM?!

—Max

There are many reasons why Dreamcast didn't take off like many of us wanted to happen, but we'll go ahead and blame PS2. The mass market didn't care about what Dreamcast offered, and PS2's hype was just too much to overcome. That's the short answer, as entire books could (and may be written about the subject).

WHAT DREAMS ARE MADE OF

NIGHTS into Dreams, created by Sonic Team on Sega's 32-bit Sega Saturn, is a classic. Yuji Naka said in an interview that they were working on *NIGHTS 2* for Dreamcast, but then the project was ended. If Naka is so unsure about updating a cult classic like *NIGHTS*, maybe he should create a *NIGHTS: Special Edition* where the gameplay stays exactly the same, but they just update the graphics. He could then add new levels in the same 2.5D-style gameplay. George Lucas didn't seem to take much flak for doing *Episodes 4 through 6 Special Editions*, but he's received plenty of criticism for *Episodes 1 and 2*. I know that if Naka would just update the classic—either in its exact form for a new console, or by upgrading the graphics but keeping gameplay the same—many fans would be elated to see this game, plus it would allow the younger generation that missed *NIGHTS* to dream...since *NIGHTS* is truly an amazing game.

—Scott Whitmore

We like the way you think, sir. Except for the undeserved praise for George Lucas. Han shot first.

WHAT ARE WE, A BUYERS' GUIDE?

Hey, GMR! I wanted to say thank you for the magazine each month. Checking the mailbox and seeing your magazine is like looking for rain but getting sunshine. And Chen's really married? Aww, that's so cute! But that's not the point. The point is, my PS2 died, and I need a new one. There's a problem, too. I have enough money for one console, and I can't decide which to get. I'm a big PS2 fan, but after a trip on my friend's Xbox and GameCube, I cannot decide which has the best selection of up-and-coming games. So, give me some help! Out of the center line, who's got the best goods? Who do you think has the best overall array of games? And when did Simon get a tortoise anyway?

—Matchstickcity

Simon won the tortoise from the semiannual Tortoise Fair and Roller Disco Championships, held in San Francisco on the vernal and autumnal equinoxes. His name is Petey, and he says to check out the Game Geezer's *Holiday Buyers' Guide* in the back of this month's issue.



→ I'm 150 years old... please kill me.

GEEZER...SECRETS

For the last 10 issues of GMR, I've enjoyed reading Game Geezer's column the most, but I just couldn't seem to remember where I saw that old man river face from before...UNTIL NOW. Could that be a picture of that old dude from the Skittles commercial from a few years ago? Have I stumbled upon your dirty little fib? Does this Geezer really exist? And what are the whereabouts of the Skittles Geezer? "Taste the Rainbow" —you've been exposed.

—Joe Clemente

While it's true the high cost of prescription drugs has forced the Geezer to do some "acting" work in the past, commercials don't appear on his

HAIK-MEP HAIK-UI

 Recently we announced a *Ninja Gaiden* haiku contest, with the grand prize being a copy of *GRM 07* signed by Team Ninja's Tomonobu Itagaki. We asked our readership to write some beautiful and inspirational poetry. This is what we got instead:

The shuriken flies
Ryu draws his silent blade
Never had a chance
—Scler

I mean, look at him
He's in black and has a sword
Ninja Gaiden rules
—Andy Triplet

A hint of breeze
then steel flashes
scarlet spatters
—Mark Filer

Grey twilight conceals
shuriken a shooting star
blood gushes freely
—Brendan Delumpa

Flying through the night
I pass much gas in strong winds
silent but deadly
—John La Forge

Piss off tell ninja
then suck on my ninja wrath!!!
Wait while Game shark loads
—Shazbot



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voluminous resumé. What kind of work did he do? Well, let's just say Pocket Geezer's resumé is a bit more...colorful.

GIL RULES EVERYTHING AROUND ME

I was just wondering if you guys felt the same way I do about Square Enix being somewhat unfair. Now, I understand the company wants to take its products to new platforms, but why, WHY must it take the next installment online only and force us to pay for it? I have LOVED the Final Fantasy series, and I want to complete the series, but I have no credit card or any such thing to pay for it—it is unfair for the fans who do not have to a payment method. On the other hand, do you guys know if Square Enix accepts anything besides credit cards?

—Jon Accommo

We, like pretty much everyone else on this planet, don't like to pay for stuff. But good things are worth paying for, and we feel the monthly fee for *FFXI* is worth it. And if you have a checking account that comes with a debit card, that should work just as well as a credit card. The only other option is to buy *FFXI* and stare at the box until *FFXI* comes out next year.

ISSUES

I work at a gaming store, and I am tired of whiney people asking us why a game isn't out yet? I don't know! I am not your mother, and it isn't in my job description to listen to you people bitch about how you could do soooooo much better on a game. JUST SHUT UP AND ENJOY WHAT YOU HAVE! MAN! Oh, one more thing for GMR, why the hell do you guys put in your magazine "better than" or "wait for it" or "not as good as" when you review a game? IF YOU WAIT FOR SOMETHING ELSE TO HIT, YOU WILL NEVER ENJOY THE GAME THAT IS OUT. With every game that comes out, you say, "wait for something else" or "something else is better." Just shut up and review the game...FAIRLY.

—Disgruntled Store Clerk

No, you shut up. That's all we got

THE FLOOD, IN D MINOR

Dear GMR, I really should be writing to Bungie, but what the heck. On the Xbox game *Halo*, my friend noticed some odd music. He bought the soundtrack, and it wasn't on it! When we stood in this very small area on the level Assault on the Control Room, we noticed some odd piano music playing. Ever heard of this?

—A Loyal Fan

Either your buddy's Xbox inadvertently outed him as a classical-music fan (not that there's anything wrong with that), or it's just ambient music used to calm the nerves of the control-room operators. Take a few steps down the hall, and you can hear John Tesh performing the old NBA on NBC theme. Honest!



THE GREATEST STORY EVER TOLD

I want to tell every one a story I was once playing *Madden 2003* when there was a knock at the door and guess who it was the po po I was like can I finish this 1/4 they was like naw I was like well then do u want to play they was like naw we wont to know if u've seen this man I was like naw he was like have a nice day I won that game 30-14 just goes to show you apsolutely nothing

—morpgrmr

Indeed.

I am a shadow
the darkness is my ally
my blade thirsts for blood
—Charles

clean the blood away
just to stain the blade again
don't call me hero
—nixduntrns

The Winner Is...

From darkness I come
carress your neck with my blade
you never saw me
—Derrick Chalon

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A large, stylized image of Crash Bandicoot, an orange bandicoot with a white stripe, wearing a white racing suit and helmet. He is riding a blue motorcycle and holding a checkered racing flag. He is also holding a large yellow foam finger with the word "I AM" on it. The background is dark and appears to be a racing track at night with some fire and smoke in the distance.

From zero to

Battle for the checkered flag with Crash, friends and foes. Use missiles, bombs, tornadoes and more to pass or blast up to 4 friends in multiplayer mode. It's time to pick up the pace or pick up the pieces.



PlayStation 2



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**CRASH
NITRO-KART**

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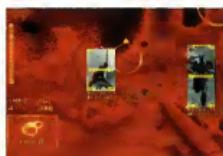
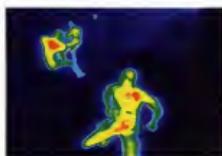
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← The success of *Splinter Cell*'s innovative multiplayer mode hinges on how well the two opposing sides are balanced. Mercenaries have more powerful weapons and motion trackers, as well as sound indicators in the HUB to alert them to the presence of sneaky spies. Spies, on the other hand, have the ability to go almost completely silent and can use things like sticky cams to spot their prey.



SPY VS. SPY

SPLINTER CELL: PANDORA TOMORROW GOES MULTIPLAYER

CANADA

When Tom Clancy's *Splinter Cell* debuted on Xbox just over a year ago, it made a huge splash. Elevating itself beyond a mere *Metal Gear* knockoff, *Splinter Cell* found the perfect mix of cutting-edge graphics technology and solid stealth-shooter action. Now, Ubisoft is beginning to bring its successor, *Pandora Tomorrow*—scheduled for Q1 2004 release—out of the shadows, and we like what we see so far.

Sam Fisher's return is much more than a simple follow-up. The single-player game adds scads of new

enhancements that should only add to the already well-tuned gameplay. New gadgets and moves, plus the ability to finish levels in multiple ways by following different paths, just add to the fun gamers had with the first title. And the enhancement of the enemy AI, which features escalating alarm levels, should add challenging depth.

But the really huge addition is the inclusion of online multiplayer. One may ask, how can you create effective player vs. player gameplay out of a game that's essentially about a lone operative who uses stealth and tactics to avoid

detection by computer-controlled guards? Well, if the developers at Ubisoft pull off what they're suggesting, they have not only figured out a way to do it, but they may have created a whole new online-multiplayer subgenre.

The developers want to maintain the series' core gameplay and not just make some sort of deathmatch. As a result, they have kept the games small, with only up to four players and two basic sides that play very differently: spy and mercenary. Playing as a spy remains close to the rest of the game's third-person stealth experience, while mercenary gameplay

takes place in a first-person view and offers more powerful weapons and specialized equipment, including motion trackers that help you spot spies creeping by. It's an objective-based game in which the mercenaries try to stop the spies from reaching a goal.

The two sides play enormously differently, and if the game gets properly balanced and the levels are designed correctly, we could see the beginning of a whole new type of revolutionary online-multiplayer action. *Splinter Cell: Pandora Tomorrow* will be unleashed on the world in early 2004. ■

PSP UNVEILED

NO. BUT IT KINDA, SORTA, MIGHT LOOK A LITTLE LIKE THIS

JAPAN

At a conference in New York explaining Sony's ongoing "Transformation '00" restructuring plan, Sony Computer Entertainment president Ken Kutaragi showed off the first publicly displayed concept model for the PSP handheld. The model features a few unusual surprises—a horizontal layout (like the original GBA's), as well as a completely smooth face, with no raised or recessed features for the directional controls or face buttons.

The disk goes in the back of the model, although it's not clear whether a lid pops open or if the disc simply slides in.

However, there are obvious ergonomic problems. The flat face looks cool, but sticking with the directional controls (as opposed to an analog stick) wouldn't make much sense, so it's not likely to bear much resemblance to the finished product. It's more like a neat bit of forward-looking eye candy for tiding us over until the real thing debuts at E3. **14**



More info at www.sony.com

PAC-MEN

SAVE YOUR QUARTERS. PAC-MAN IS COMING BACK FOR FREE

JAPAN

This Christmas, Nintendo is giving away games for free...sort of. *Pac-Man Vs.*—the game Shigeru Miyamoto proudly presented during last E3 as the epitome of Nintendo's connectivity initiative—will be included as a free bonus with three Namco games: the Player's Choice rerelease of *Pac-Man World 2, R: Racing Evolution*, and *I-Ninja* (the last of which will only be found at specialty shops like Electronics Boutique).

Designed this term used loosely by Mr. Miyamoto, *Pac-Man Vs.* pits three players with GameCube controllers

against one player with a Game Boy Advance. The GBA holder plays the standard version of *Pac-Man* on the GBA screen, while the other three play as ghosts on the television. Indeed, the best things in life are free. **14**



More info at www.nintendo.com

GAMEPORT VITAL GAME INFO. NOW BOARDING.

→ Arrivals COMING SOON

SYSTEM	ETA	TITLE	HOW HOT?
PC, XB	DEC	DEUS EX: INVISIBLE WAR	████████
Man, why can't this war start already?		SWORD OF MANA	████████
GBA	DEC	A classic game is somewhat reborn.	████████
PS2	DEC	.HACK//QUARANTINE	████
		.Not to be confused with the CBS drama.	
GC, PS2, XB	DEC	R: RACING EVOLUTION	████
		The natural successor of <i>Ridge Racer</i> .	
GC, PS2, XB	JAN	SONIC HEROES	████████
		The hedgehog's first-ever multiplatform appearance.	
GC	JAN	HARVEST MOON: A WONDERFUL LIFE	████████
		Get married and buy a cow. If truly is a wonderful life.	
PS2, XB	JAN	BALOUR'S GATE: DARK ALLIANCE 2	████████
		Seven-in-one percent more hack, 93 percent more slash.	
GC, PS2, XB	JAN	NFL STREET	████████
		We learned our strong-safety blitz on the streets, yes?	
PC	JAN	BREED	████████
		A "first-person shooter," whatever that means.	
GBA	JAN	RIVER CITY RANSOM	████████
		Once again, a classic game is somewhat reborn.	
PS2	JAN	MAXIMO VS. ARMY OF ZIN	████████
		Wearing heart-shaped-printed boxers for a week.	
PS2	FEB	SYPHON FILTER: OMEGA STRAIN	████████
		No more Gabe. Now you're in charge.	
XB	FEB	BREAKDOWN	████
		Punching someone in the face is always a good time.	
PS2	FEB	STAR OCEAN: TILL THE END OF TIME	████████
		So, how many hours is that going to take?	
PC	FEB	ULTIMA X: ODYSSEY	████████
		Best played after Leisure Suit Larry died.	
GC	FEB	FINAL FANTASY: CRYSTAL CHRONICLES	████████
		The delay gives you more time to buy three more GBAs.	

← DEPARTURES OUT NOW

SYSTEM	TITLE	GMR SCORE
ALL	BEYOND GOOD & EVIL	9 ¹⁰
	Way beyond good	
PS2, XB	ESPN BASKETBALL	8 ¹⁰
	Carmelo Anthony.	
ALL	NBA LIVE 2004	8 ¹⁰
	LeBron James	
PS2	CASTLEVANIA: LAMENT OF INNOCENCE	8 ¹⁰
	We lament nothing! Well, just a few things.	
GBA	FIRE EMBLEM	8 ¹⁰
	Like Advance Wars, only all serious and stuff.	
ALL	TONY HAWK'S UNDERGROUND	10 ¹⁰
	Don't worry, it's still mainstream friendly	
PS2	FINAL FANTASY X-2	9 ¹⁰
	Dr. Gaius Meets Barbatos, The Game!	
GC	KIRBY'S AIR RIDE	4 ¹⁰
	Even three-year-olds should feel insulted.	
GBA, GC, PS2	TAK & THE POWER OF JUJU	7 ¹⁰
	Consumers & The Power of Choice.	
GC, PS2, XB	METAL ARMS: GLITCH IN THE SYSTEM	7 ¹⁰
	Can't go wrong with robots that blow stuff up.	
ALL	TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES	6 ¹⁰
	Herrers in a half game.	
GC	ROGUE SQUADRON III: REBEL STRIKE	7 ¹⁰
	Planned fast maneuvers keep it from being gawd	
PS2	KARAOKE REVOLUTION	8 ¹⁰
	The best new way to humiliates yourself in public.	
PS2	SOCOM II	9 ¹⁰
	Stryfe, camouflage not included.	
PS2, XB	KILLSWITCH	8 ¹⁰
	Driving for cover might not be brave, but it sure is practical.	
PS2	RATCHET & CLANK: GOING COMMANDO	9 ¹⁰
	The nuts and bolts of great gameplay	

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HALF-LIFE 2

Even though developer Valve and publisher Viendi are claiming their hotly anticipated first-person shooter for PC will be in stores in time for Christmas, it's looking ever more doubtful. *Half-Life 2* will see a 2003 release. Chalk it up to a hacker who stole the source code back in September by cracking Valve's servers through Gabe Newell's own e-mail. There are also questions on the status of Steam, Valve's proprietary downloading service that aims to be the main distribution model for the game and its updates. And rumors that *Half-Life 2* will run only on certain videocards are also false. While Valve is endorsing ATI and has entered a bundling agreement with the cardmaker, *Half-Life 2* will work with Nvidia chipsets just fine. When it actually comes out, that is. **II-E**

CLICKS

GO HERE, NOW! [POLTRON](#)[WWW.1UP.COM](#)

A month between GMRs can leave a soul mighty lonely. Why not warm the cockles of your heart at 1UP.com? There, you can read news as it happens, browse forums, and peruse past articles from the entire array of Ziff Davis gaming publications, including *CGW*, *EGM*, *OPM*, *XBN*, and—our personal favorite—GMR. **II-E**

[SCREEN]

INDY CINEMA

NO TIME FOR LOVE, DR. JONES!

RATED PG-13 180 MINUTES TOTAL | FOUR DISCS | DIRECTED BY STEVEN SPIELBERG

→ It's about damn time that the *Indiana Jones* trilogy came out on DVD! We've already blown too much money on replacement videotapes over the years. But at least all our waiting has paid off.

For the three of you living under a rock who have no idea what we're talking about, here's the quick breakdown: Adventurer Indiana Jones finds ancient relics (in number four, he's looking for Game Geezer's lost boxes), beats down Nazis, liberates Indian slave children, and...did we mention beating down Nazis? A tribute to those old serials that people used to see in theaters, these are all awesome action flicks that live on well beyond their age. Hell, the first one came out in 1981.

Purists out there will be happy to know Paramount didn't screw up the film with any "director's cut" BS—only the original theatrical releases with optimized sound and a clear color print will be included. Those of you hardcore enough to own a widescreen television will be happy to know the films are tweaked for 16:9 sets.

The one thing we are missing here, though, is any kind of commentary track. You know, maybe have Steven Spielberg talk about what it was like to pick up Kate Capshaw while on the set of *Temple of Doom*, or have George Lucas publicly apologize for his "work" on the recent *Star Wars* movies.

Otherwise, Paramount, we tip our dusty fedoras to you. The films are all classics, and this box set is an absolute must-have for any self-respecting film fan.

Special features: The real juice from this box set comes from disc four. It's packed with bonus material, and you get a feature-length documentary. You also get an inside look at the films and how they all came together. There are interviews with the cast and crew, some deleted footage, and one crazy-ass screen test with Tom Selleck as Indy.

GMR also recommends: *Tenacious D: The Complete Masterworks Vol. 1; 28 Days Later; The Office: The Complete First Series.* **II-E**



→ "Hollywood Homicide was a good film, dammit!" to Harrison Ford still up for *Indy IV*, or will it prove to be too much for the, shall we say, "seasoned" actor? One thing's for sure, when it's released, we'll all have to buy the new box set.

PLAYSTATION KNOWLEDGE
THEY KNOW STUFF SO YOU DON'T HAVE TO!

JOHN DAWSON

OPEN YOUR WALLET

→ So, there are about 20 sequel PS2 games out right now, and lots of them are good. To buy them all, you'd have to spend a fortune, and let's face it—it's just not possible. What's the solution? Chances are, you're going to have to choose five and then trade them in when you're done. But which five?

First, *SOCOM II*, because it's possibly the best online shooter ever made, and if Jeff can find a PC game that's better, I'll eat my socks. Next, *Ratchet & Clank: Going Commando*, because it has all the good bits about RPGs mixed up with all the good bits about platform games—and lots of big guns. *Prince of Persia* would have to be one of them, because it may well be one of the best experiences released this year. Next, I'd have to say *Tony Hawk's Underground*, because it's such a complete and fantastically realized experience. Finally, I think I'd have to plump for *The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King*, because kicking the crap out of orcs is awesome, especially when it looks this good. If you have non-game-playing friends or relatives visiting for the holidays, you might want to go for *Eve Toy* as well. It's not something you'll play on your own, but it'll fill in those uncomfortable silences when your least favorite aunt turns up. **II-E**

John Dawson is Editor-in-Chief of The Official U.S. PlayStation Magazine.



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mail got you this excited?

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PC
KNOWLEDGE
THEY KNOW STUFF SO YOU DON'T HAVE TO!

JEFF GREEN

NO LIFE

OK, so the holidays are upon us and we have no *Half-Life 2*. Bummer. But we should've known. Of course, no one could have predicted Valve would get its code stolen, and that seriously sucks. I feel bad for Valve, and I hope the guy who did it gets caught and rayed alive.

Still, the rumors of *Half-Life 2*'s delays were swirling around before the source code was even stolen. A reputable source told me back in September that there was no way Valve would ship it in 2003. The theft of the source code is, in some sense, a nice cover story to put on the game's delay. I'm not saying the theft isn't real or that it isn't the main reason for the delay—I'm just saying that it is a convenient timing thing that allows Valve to take more time on the game while being able to shift the blame to someone else.

But, whatever. *Half-Life* is one of my favorite games of all time, and I want the sequel to be great, too. If Valve needs more time to make that happen, so be it. There are other great shooters to play right now, such as *Max Payne 2* and *Call of Duty: Vortex* has had a rough couple of months. Let's just leave the company alone now and pray it has another masterpiece waiting in the wings. **EE**

Jeff Green is Editor-in-Chief of Computer Gaming World magazine.

IN FROM THE COLD
BILL ROPER TALKS ABOUT LIFE AFTER BLIZZARD

Nine guys are crammed into a house in the outskirts of San Francisco. This is the current headquarters of upstart developer Flagship Studios, staffed entirely by former bigwigs at Blizzard North. David Brevik, Max and Erich Schaefer, Kenneth Williams, and Bill Roper are brainstorming the next big game they want to create. "Right now, we have a lineup of top talent [including the guy behind the latest *Diablo II* 1.10 patch], and we're just looking for the right people to move forward," says Roper.

Rather than worrying about fancy state-of-the-art offices, the focus is on the hardware, software, and people as they begin work. It's still way too early to talk about when the game is coming out, or even what it's about, but Roper is promising something different. "When we sat down to think of what to do for our game, we came up with ideas and asked each other, 'has

anyone ever done this before?'" All he could confirm is that the game won't be what you'd expect from them...meaning it probably won't be an RTS. He has, however, confirmed that it's a quest-based game that will have single-player and online-multiplayer components—but, more important, he says it's a PC title first and foremost. "That's what we're known for and what we do best," he says. Still, this mystery game apparently also lends itself to the console world.

The team already has a basic 3D engine in place as it starts creating the game world, and it will flesh out the skeleton of the title along the way. But don't expect to see anything on store shelves until sometime in 2005. There's still a lot of work to be done—like signing a deal with a publisher. **EE**
—Darren Gladstone.

[More info at: www.flagshipstudios.com](http://www.flagshipstudios.com)

N-GAGE M-PLODES
NOKIA'S CELL PHONE FOR GAMERS DISAPPOINTS

NORWAY

After a massive ad campaign, Nokia's N-Gage handheld crashed and burned when it launched worldwide on October 7. Arcadia Research reckoned less than 5,000 units sold in America during the system's first week of release, or less than 1 percent of the GBA units sold during its first week.

In England, Chart-Track reported that only 500 units moved through U.K. game stores in the same week, despite phone-service rebates that knocked the system's price down to £100 or less. More sold through cell-phone retailers,

but sales were so sluggish across the board that some phone-service deals knocked its price down to all of one penny three weeks after launch.

Price cuts came just as swiftly in the United States. EB Games and GameStop both offered \$100 instant rebates two weeks after launch—the fastest hardware price cuts in the history of the games industry.

Nokia kept up a brave front throughout the debacle, touting a figure of "400,000 units sold." Only when prodded would Nokia admit those 400,000 sold to retailers, not

consumers—at press time, Nokia still refuses to release hard sell-through numbers. Word from major retailers, however, is that they don't plan to order more N-Gages anytime soon. **EE**

—D.L. Smith



[BLIPS]

Chappelle Show

Rumor has it that comedian Dave Chappelle is currently recording voiceover for a new *Grand Theft Auto* game. Chappelle is such a fan of GTA that he's even spoofed it on his Comedy Central show.

BloodRayne 2

Majesco announced *BloodRayne 2*, the next installment in the burgeoning sexy vampires series. Slated for an October 2004 release, it'll have you biting and shooting your butt off on PS2, Xbox, and PC.

So?

Ubisoft has signed a deal with Peter Gabriel to provide music for *Uru: Ages Beyond Myst*. He's already provided one song, "Burn You Up, Burn You Down," and he'll do more music for the sequel.

[TALENT]

LARRY HOLLAND

I JUST WANNA FLY

→ If you've been playing games since the late '80s, you should be familiar with the name Larry Holland—especially if you're a fan of LucasArts' series of WWII flight sims, which includes *Secret Weapons of the Luftwaffe*, and the company's classic *Tie Fighter* series. A graduate of Cornell University, Larry is back doing the dogfighting thing with *Secret Weapons over Normandy*. We caught him between missions for a quick Q&A.

GMR: You're a brainy guy. What the heck are you doing designing videogames?

LH: Good question: Maybe it's for the long hours, because when you really get to the bottom of it, I must be a masochist. Or, to put it more delicately, it's probably because I love a big, big challenge. Designing and developing is certainly that; there is probably no bigger creative challenge than bringing a videogame to market. My first career choice was to be an archaeologist, someone who scratched the earth to discover artifacts that could be used to reconstruct lost civilizations. The part of this seemingly romantic but ultimately hot and sweaty business that fascinated me was bringing those worlds back to life again.

Two decades ago, I climbed out of the trenches, literally, and saw the light of the future...computers. Now, through the medium of videogames and their ability to deliver a high-fidelity experience, I can re-create and immerse people in these past worlds in an involving way—as I like to put it, bringing the past into the future in living color.

GMR: Flight sims have a reputation for being dry. Why are yours so much fun?

LH: It's a result of where we put our

focus. Most flight sims focus on getting the planes modeled in all their glory, full of detail and complexity—especially with regard to their flight dynamics. Once we get the planes looking beautiful, we decide on a more simplified flight dynamic scheme, and then we focus on the battle (i.e., the dogfight, the conflict, the action).

We put a lot of effort into building a game system and set of tools that allow our mission designers to create missions with intricate battle choreography. In many senses, we strive to create a combat simulation, not a flight simulation. Additionally, the controls are easy to learn, and the mastering comes from learning how to be effective in a complex battle environment.

GMR: Me 109 vs. TIE fighter, who wins?

LH: Interesting matchup. Now, the 109 is a rugged plane with good speed, but the TIE fighter does have the upper hand in terms of maneuverability and firepower. Don't forget, though, that the TIE fighter is quite a fragile spacecraft—a few hits and it pops like popcorn. Ultimately, it comes down to the pilot. Are we talking one of Darth Vader's hapless minions or one of *Totally Games'* crack pilots in the cockpit?

GMR: WWII and a galaxy far, far away have been featured in your games. Where else would you like to go?

LH: The Yucatan. It's got beautiful beaches and ancient ruins, and it's a birdwatcher's paradise. Oh I get it...what other setting for a game? From WWI to the present, WWII is probably the best setting of them all, though I wouldn't mind trying our hand at something post-WWII. A fantasy setting has appeal, especially one that involves fire-breathing creatures, but that's been done.



GMR: Do you do any real-life piloting yourself?

LH: Nope, I stick to games, it's much safer. Since I've trained myself to fly an aircraft only via videogames, I wouldn't trust myself in a real cockpit. God knows what kind of crazy stunt I'd try to pull off thinking I was in the safe confines of my living room. I know I'd end up as a smoking crater somewhere.

GMR: How does SWOTL fit in with the universe of SWOT?

LH: The best way to phrase it is that SWOTL is a "sequel in spirit" to SWOT, as SWOT is steeped in the same great aerial arms race of WWII as SWOTL. It taps into the advances in aviation that German and other scientists made during WWII. SWOTL utilizes several similar craft, like the Me 262 jet fighter and the Me 163 Komet.

What differs in the two products is how this era's drama is presented: SWOTL tells the story of an American pilot named James Chase who joins the RAF to fight the Luftwaffe and stop their terrifying secret weapons. SWOTL has no story and focuses on Northern Europe. SWOT's missions span the globe.

GMR: What's next for *Totally Games*?

LH: Much rejoicing, then a shower, a shave, and a nice long vacation. After that, there will surely be more secrets to uncover. ■

XBOX
KNOWLEDGE
THEY KNOW STUFF SO YOU
DON'T HAVE TO!



EVAN SHAMOON

AWARENESS

→ Of the approximately 9 million Xbox games floating around the office this holiday season, what has me most excited about the future of the console is not actually a game. Live Aware is one of Xbox Live's newest features, and it's one that should not be overlooked.

Live Aware is essentially an option embedded in certain land in the near future, ALIIX Xbox games that allows anyone playing a game—in offline single-player mode—to be seen as "online" by people on his or her Friends List. Real-world situation: You get home from a long day at work/school/ target practice, longing to take out your cubicine-and-coffee-induced aggression on your friends via a cathartic game of Rainbow Six 3. Sadly, none are online. So, rather than stare wistfully out the window reminiscing about memories past, you fire up a game of Prince of Persia: The Sands of Time, but at any time, you can quickly check your Friends List to see if anyone has logged on. Additionally, your friends will be able to see that you're online and send you invites that pop up in the game you're playing. A simple feature, really, but just the type of detail that console games truly need to make the leap to online. ■

—Evan Shamoon is Editor-In-Chief of Xbox Nation.

[BLIPS]

Dungeon Siege movie

→ In the continuing stream of game-to-movie licenses comes the news that Gas Powered Games' *Dungeon Siege* RPG is headed to the silver screen. Let's hope it's better than that D&D movie.

Romero's got a job

→ Erstwhile id and Ion Storm designer/long-haired celebrity game developer John Romero has a new gig. Along with cohort Tom Hall, he's been hired by Midway to work on games in-house.

UT 2004 bumped

→ It looks like PC first-person shooter *Unreal Tournament 2004* will actually hit the streets in 2004, thanks to a delay announced by publisher Atari. Keep your rocket launchers warm.

NINTENDO
KNOWLEDGE
THEY KNOW STUFF SO YOU
DON'T HAVE TO!



PHIL THEOBALD

KICKIN' IT OLD SCHOOL

Nintendo is living in the past, but that's not necessarily a bad thing. It started innocently enough—a few GBA ports of NES and SNES titles, some NES e-Reader cards—and no one really seemed to notice.

Then, Nintendo made that darn Wind Waker bonus disc with *Ocarina of Time*. Well, that lit a retro fire under Nintendo fans' collective asses. Suddenly, speculation arose that there would be similar bonus discs containing older versions of *F-Zero* and *Mario Kart* to coincide with the GameCube updates of those franchises.

Sadly, this wasn't the case, although fans still want to revisit their favorites from yesteryear. And with the new *Zelda* bonus disc bundled with GameCube (it has even more classic *Zelda* games on it), Nintendo continues to give fans what they want.

Of course, some may argue that by dumping old games on new systems, Nintendo has become creatively bankrupt and must resort to simple nostalgia to generate sales. There's certainly an argument for that, but the fact remains that these games are classics for a reason—they're still great fun to play.

We love the glimpses into the past, Nintendo—just don't forget that we like a little innovation, too. **EB**

Phil Theobald is Reviews Editor at GameSpot.

GMR CHARTS

TOP-SELLING GAMES FOR EVERY SYSTEM FOR OCTOBER 03

IN ASSOCIATION WITH

EB GAMES
electronics boutique

TOP 10 ALL FORMATS

RANK	TITLE	FORMAT	SCORE
01	NBA LIVE 2004	PS2	8
	The NBA: It's trial-lawyer-tastic!		
02	WWE SMACKDOWN: HCTP	PS2	8
	Relive the latest exploits of those wacky McMahons and their crazy crew of wrestlers!		
03	FINAL FANTASY XI	PC	8
	PC gamers get this one first—must be payback for that <i>Halo</i> thing.		
04	JAK II	PS2	8
	How many of you actually bought <i>Jak II</i> because it was "edgier"? And what are your addresses?		
05	RAINBOW SIX 3	XB	8
	Open, purchase, and clear.		
06	SOCOM II	PS2	9
	Shoot your buddy in the head. Go on, it's OK.		
07	TONY HAWK'S UNDERGROUND	PS2	10
	We made a skate park with just one 30-mile-long rail. It's totally fun, we swear.		
08	SMA4: SUPER MARIO BROS. 3	GBA	9
	Still a lot of you doin' the Mario, whatever the hell that means.		
09	CALL OF DUTY	PC	7
	Don't even think about *69ing the call of duty. They've got that blocking thing going on.		
10	CASTLEVANIA: LOI	PS2	8
	The forces of evil thank you for your business.		

PS2 TOP 10

		SCORE
01	NBA LIVE 2004	8
02	WWE SMACKDOWN: HCTP	8
03	JAK II	8
04	SOCOM II	9
05	TONY HAWK'S UNDERGROUND	10
06	CASTLEVANIA: LOI	8
07	SSX 3	9
08	MADEEN NFL 2004	9
09	ESPN NBA BASKETBALL 2004	8
10	TRUE CRIME: SOLA	7

XBOX TOP 10

		SCORE
01	RAINBOW SIX 3	8
02	NBA LIVE 2004	8
03	TRUE CRIME: SOLA	7
04	GTA DOUBLE PACK	10
05	CRIMSON SKIES: HRR	8
06	ESPN NBA BASKETBALL 2004	8
07	TONY HAWK'S UNDERGROUND	10
08	SSX 3	9
09	CONFLICT DESERT STORM	6
10	TOP SPIN	9

PC TOP 10

		SCORE
01	FINAL FANTASY XI	8
02	CALL OF DUTY	7
03	DA/DC: TRIALS OF ATLANTIS	TBD
04	MAX PAYNE 2	7
05	HALO	8
06	THE SIMS: MAKIN' MAGIC	TBD
07	C&C GENERALS: ZERO HOUR	TBD
08	AOM: THE TITANS	7
09	STAR WARS: JEDI ACADEMY	7
10	MOH AA: BREAKTHROUGH	TBD

GBA TOP 10

		SCORE
01	SMA4: SUPER MARIO BROS. 3	9
02	FF TACTICS ADVANCE	9
03	MEGA MAN ZERO 2	TBD
04	POKEMON PINBALL	7
05	DONKEY KONG COUNTRY	6
06	POKEMON RUBY	7
07	POKEMON SAPPHIRE	7
08	FIRE EMBLEM	8
09	YU-GI-OH! WORLD	7
10	KIRBY	6

GC TOP 10

		SCORE
01	SW RS3: REBEL STRIKE	7
02	VIEWTIFUL JOE	9
03	TMNT	6
04	KIRBY'S AIR RIOE	4
05	NCAA FOOTBALL 2004	9
06	TONY HAWK'S UNDERGROUND	10
07	NBA LIVE 2004	8
08	SOUL CALIBUR II	9
09	SSX 3	9
10	SIMPSONS HIT & RUN	8



"THE MOST INTENSE WWII SHOOTER EVER!"

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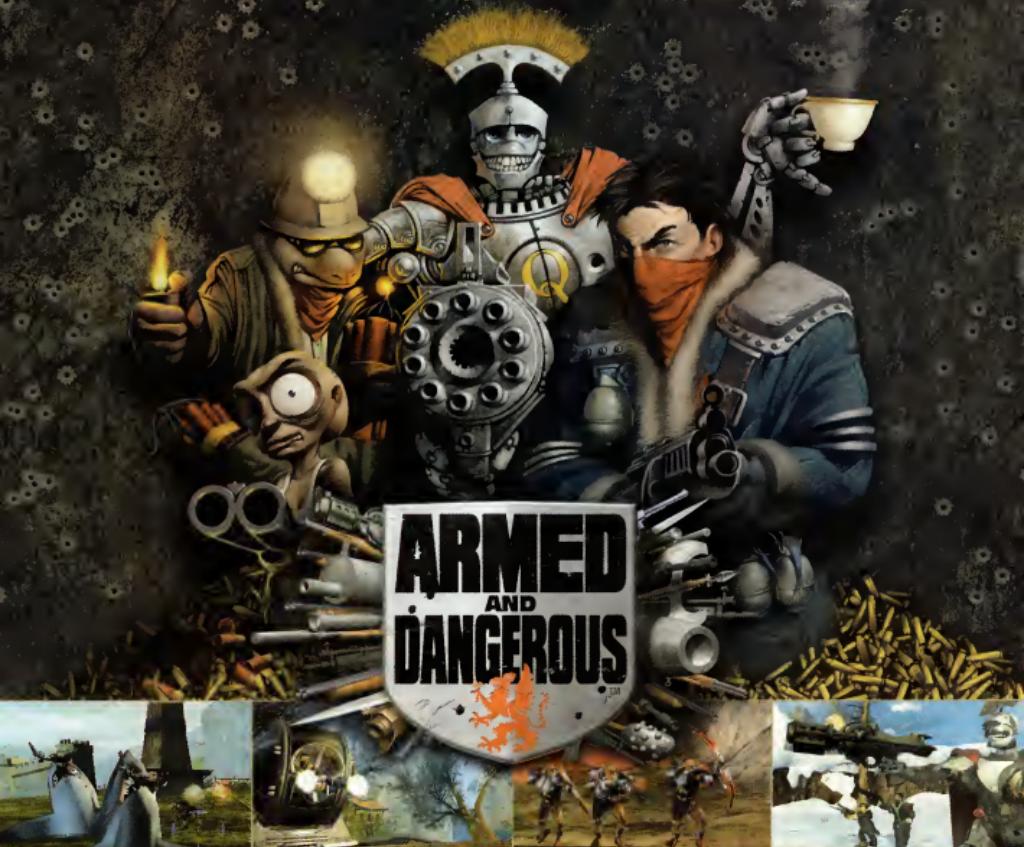
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★★★★ "nonstop action" - Maxim ★★★★ - Stuff Gamer

“It’s like there’s a party in your mind, and everyone’s invited!” - GME

... or so. It's like there's a party in your mind, and everyone's invited. - **DMX**
fulls-to-the-wall action. Expect all manner of destructive mayhem. - **PC Game**

"A comic effect sans with a sense of humor," Rolling Stone. "So over-the-top we can't help but love it." Alternative Press.



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TIME MAGAZINE

DEVELOPED BY:



PlayStation®2

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grand theft auto

double
Pack

grand theft auto III & grand theft auto
vice city



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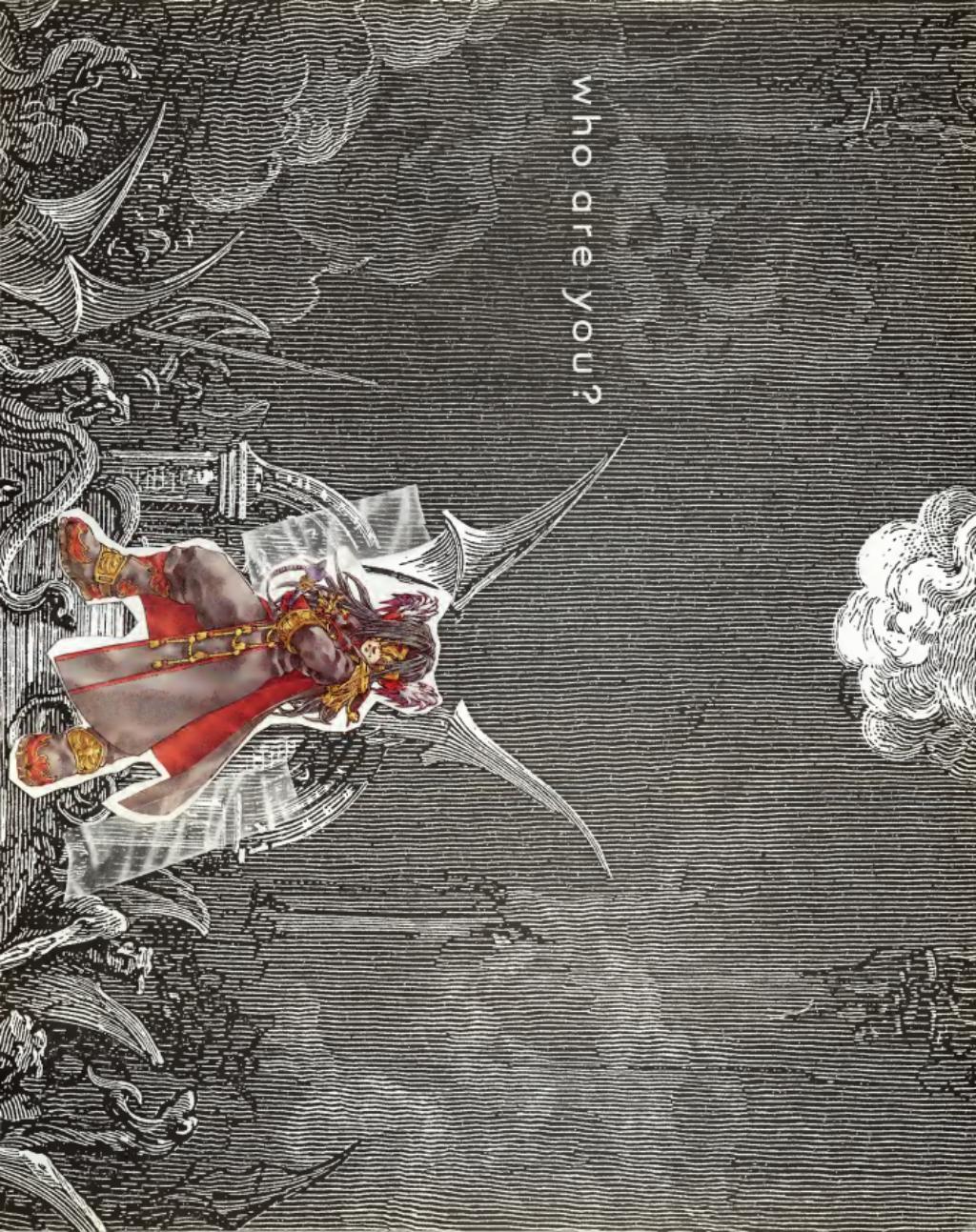
VERSION BY:



Non-Rockstar will be following ESRB guidelines for M rated games in the marketing of this game. This game contains violent language and behavior and may not be appropriate for persons under the age of 17. It is the developer's interpretation of player activity and the story, names and events depicted herein are fictitious. No real location or similarity to actual persons, living or dead, or to actual events is intended or should be inferred. Any resemblance is coincidental. The makers and publishers of this videogame do not in any way endorse, condone or encourage this kind of behavior.



A gladiator hungry for revenge. A young girl haunted by the ghosts of her past. Together, the two must unite and race to protect the Mana Tree from those who would turn its awesome powers to dark ends. Choose your hero, uncover the secret of the Mana Tree and save the ancient wellspring of all life in the epic *Sword of Mana*.



Who are you?

NEXT >>

INCOMING GAMES PREVIEWED



PREVIEWED THIS ISSUE:

007: EVERYTHING OR NOTHING	00A/00/PS2/XB	040
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VAN HELSING	PS2/XB	042
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WARNING!
HAZARDOUS MATERIAL

Here at GNR, we preview games a little differently. To ensure that our previews are as relevant as possible, we feature only titles that will be released within six months. We also record our level of excitement about the game with cool, little flames. Previews are not reviews—they're merely a guide as to how good a game-in-progress is looking. It's a snapshot. If we're not very excited about it, the game receives one or two flames. If we're taking a wait-and-see attitude, expect to see three flames. Over and above that, you can bet we're pretty excited. It's our duty to tell you what we think at every stage of a game's development cycle—positive, negative, or somewhere in between.



→ Formerly known as Lost Boys Studios, Guerrilla has been creating technology oddballs for PS2 for over three years, and the look and feel of Killzone are apparent in every aspect of the game. Twelve to 20 enemies can be rendered onscreen at once, depending on the mission. The game's intense explosions, screams, and howling wind are surprisingly reminiscent of the spooky-sounding Silent Hill series.

RELEASE | TBD

KILLZONE

DEVELOPED BY SONY COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT EUROPE | PUBLISHED BY SONY COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT

MAKE THE SCENE

At first look, *Guerrilla Games'* eagerly awaited FPS may not seem revolutionary, but there's something to be said for doing right by the tried-and-true. And after actually getting into the game, it's clear that something special is going on here.

Custom-built for PS2, *Killzone* features vibrant textures and highly detailed character models and environments—some of the best-looking yet seen on the system.

Killzone is about a war—a very big war. A separatist group called Helghast has broken off from Earth's ISA forces and is currently engaged in terrorist activities. As a member of a four-man

ISA team, you are sent on a mission to quash the Helghast threat—and you're not expected to return.

Gameplay varies depending on which of the four team members (and their respective skill sets) you choose for each level. For example, the stealthy Luger can climb on ropes to reach higher areas of the level, while his teammates must stay on the ground and watch. And the designers are eager to point out that there are no lasers, plasma rifles, or any other sort of future-boom in *Killzone*. All of the game's 22 weapons are loosely based on what real-life weapons will likely evolve into in about 10 years' time.

Killzone has a distinct look and feel. The art direction favors green, gray, and dark colors. Guerrilla has conjured up some very impressive filters, which create the game's bleak, industrial look. Whether you are rolling through a deserted shopping mall or a dense jungle crisscrossed with rivers, the game looks striking. Having an in-house musician has also paid off; superb audio effects impart *Killzone* with a desperate, nippy feel.

At this point, the action consists mostly of tight firefights and careful navigation through the lushly rendered environments. There is, thankfully, little in the way of puzzles. Obviously, much

of the game's effectiveness will depend on how well your AI-controlled companions act. Teammates can be killed, and since their firepower is crucial to completing the game's tougher objectives, it's imperative to keep them healthy.

It's promising that, while still a year off, *Killzone* is already highly playable. Although it's probably best to ease off the *Half-life*-killer talk, the game's level design is diverse and tight and the controls are great, which bodes well for the final product. ■

GMA SAYS → Now all we want to know is when to expect a *Statistics* release.

→ **HOW HOT...**





← As a member of Phantom Ian's either Bishop, the guy agent, or Sheila, the female agent you use all manner of cool, high-tech gadgetry to achieve your goals. Stealth, of course, is key, since cameras will grip onto you, crawl on walls like Spider-Man, yolo, and patch grenades are among the gadgets you will use to sneak past your enemies—or eliminate them altogether.



RELEASE | FEBRUARY

SPY FICTION

SYSTEM: PS2 PUBLISHER: SAMMY STUDIOS DEVELOPER: ACCESS GAMES

SNEAK UP ON PEOPLE, BREAK THEIR DAMN NECKS

→ Love skulking around like a sneaky Pete but hate waiting three years between each iteration of *Metal Gear Solid*? Well, Sammy Studios and newly formed developer Access Games (featuring former Konami veterans and ex-members of Deep Space, the development team behind *Extermination* on PS2) are bringing a totally new stealth-action experience your way in early 2004.

Combining the diverse talents of Access Games with those of renowned anime and manga artist Range Murata (whose work you can find in *Blue Submarine No. 6* and old import Saturn games such as *Wacherröder* and

Groove On Fight), *Spy Fiction* introduces two new kids—Bishop and Sheila—to the stealth block.

While the graphical similarities to *Metal Gear Solid* are numerous (exclamation points over enemy heads, Z's for sleeping guards, choke-hold moves, leaping up against the wall, etc.), *Spy Fiction* still brings some fresh, new ideas to the table. Among its distinguishing character abilities is stealth camouflage, which activates any time you stay still. The impressive effect works well, although a guard may still sense your presence if you're lurking too close to him.

Another neat gameplay element is

the significant use of hand-mounted wall grips. These devices let you scale walls and slither along ceilings as enemies pass by underneath. Combining this technique with the stealth camouflage allows for deep operations into enemy territory to take place with minimum combat.

That's not to say altercations don't take place. Quite the contrary. While sneaking around is helpful in successfully penetrating enemy compounds, you ultimately have to drop the opposition by utilizing your diverse arsenal of high-tech toys.

Helping you get the jump on things are other useful skills, like stealing

identities, voices, and even fingerprints. Parachuting, hang gliding, and rappelling sections also come into play. In fact, the game starts off with you dropping 10,000 feet from the sky toward your first objective (much like the original *MDK*'s opening sequence).

Sure, *Spy Fiction* wears its inspiration on its sleeve, but it's still a refreshing alternative to the same old, same old. And as long as the gameplay comes out on top, that's all we care about. →

GMG SAYS → If you're gonna swipe from something you might as well swipe from the best. Even as *Spy Fiction* stands up on its own merits

→ HOW HOT...



RELEASE | JANUARY

SONIC HEROES

SYSTEM: GC/PS2/XBOX PUBLISHER: SEGA DEVELOPER: SONIC TEAM

FOOL ME ONCE, NAKA...

With the end of *PSO*, the beginning of *Billy Hatcher*, and the celebrated hedgehog's revival in *Sonic Heroes*, Sonic Team is at a turning point. *Billy Hatcher* proved to be a better game than either *3D Sonic*, but its success comes from the fact that it's different from anything a *3D Sonic* game could be. *Will Heroes* finally live up to its potential, or will it just be *Sonic Adventure 2* again, times three?

At the moment, the signs don't point either way. The speed is there—the way it always has been—but the depth Sega has promised hasn't yet come to light. *Sonic Heroes* needs to find a way to make its three-character gimmick fun—while it's a novel

concept for the first level or two, it needs more applications than the railed demonstration levels offer.

We hope *Sonic Team* has learned some lessons from *Billy Hatcher*: slow down, keep the camera in check, and hook the player with depth instead of flashy, scripted speed bursts. There are signs it's headed in that direction, including the solid controls and pointers that indicate different applications of each character's skills, but only time will tell whether the third game or dimension proves to be a charm for Sonic and friends. **EE**

GMR SAYS → *Heroes* is coming along

at a good clip, but there's a long way to go
→ HOW HOT...



- Reconnaissance?
- Rescue?
- Just need my space?

NEXT »

INCOMING GAMES

007: everything or nothing → the legend of zelda: four swords → air force delta strike



RELEASE | SPRING

007: EVERYTHING OR NOTHING

SYSTEM: GC | PUBLISHER: NINTENDO | DEVELOPER: NINTENDO

HIT THE LINKS

As a value-added extra to last year's GBA *Link to the Past* port, *Four Swords* serves as a highly entertaining, if not terribly unique, multiplayer experience for gamers on the go. Its upcoming renovation as a standalone title on GameCube is one of the bugaboos for the good ship connectivity, incorporating features involving *Gauntlet* with *Link*. Not that we'd mind such a thing.

The basic premise remains the same: You and up to three (soon-to-be-no-longer) friends choose a Link-favored color, then team up to solve puzzles and take on enemies. And when the other guys are busy fending

off the hordes of temperamental guards, you can steal all their stuff. The best part comes when you break away from your team: Go into any house or underground area, and you'll move from the television to your GBA screen, hidden from the others and left to your own devices—the perfect recipe for further underhanded shenanigans.

These most recent screenshots from Nintendo are a bit different from the original ones released during E3, and we approve of the new watercolor-like art style. Now, all we ask for is a MSRP less than \$49.99. **IE**

GMA SAYS → Until we see the price tag, our enthusiasm remains somewhat in check.

→ HOW HOT...

007: EVERYTHING OR NOTHING

SYSTEM: GBA/GC/PS2/XB | PUBLISHER: ELECTRONIC ARTS | DEVELOPER: ELECTRONIC ARTS

BECAUSE THERE'S NO 'T' IN CO-OP PLAY

It might be time to give a damn about Bond games again. With a *Mya* theme song, a script by *Bond* scribe Bruce Feirstein, and the voices and likenesses of Pierce Brosnan and Willem Dafoe, EA is lavishing the sort of attention on the upcoming *007: Everything or Nothing* that it previously reserved for its similarly cinematic, crackerjack *Lord of the Rings* series.

But it's the way the game plays that should really make you take notice. You've heard that its third-person shooting levels are superhot and that the motorcycle stages produced by the *Need for Speed: Underground* team are frigging gorgeous, but the multiplayer stages have been secret—until now. We've learned that the four-player Powerstone-like multiplayer arenas have become unlockable extras, presumably so developers could focus on the two-player co-op levels, which can be played splitscreen or, if you own a PS2, online. In co-op, you play as two of

Bond's fellow MI6 secret agents and must coordinate your efforts to wipe out hornet's nests of enemy soldiers, provide covering fire as one of you rappels down the side of a building, and simultaneously press security buttons to open doors (now that's teamwork!).

Like the driving stages in *Everything or Nothing*, these co-op levels still need a lot of fine-tuning, and with the game's recent delay to spring of 2004, it looks as though they just might get it. If EA can polish the entire game to the luster of the main missions, *Everything or Nothing* could end up being the best *Bond* since *GoldenEye 007*. **IE**

GMA SAYS → Bond and blowing up bubbles go together like a march and the shakers.



WINNING ELEVEN 7

SYSTEM: PS2 | PUBLISHER: KONAMI OF AMERICA | DEVELOPER: KONAMI

Just as the sixième part d'orte in part 6 Konami's bringing over another *Winning Eleven* Numbered 7, this latest revision sports some significant improvements, such as improved defensive AI, new player animations, and a revamped Master League. If last year's version was any indication, it's safe to assume *Winning Eleven 7* will be another direct lock for footy fans.

RELEASE | FEBRUARY



RELEASE | FEBRUARY

CITY OF HEROES

SYSTEM: PC PUBLISHER: NCsoft DEVELOPER: CRYPTIC STUDIOS

SPARE SOME TIGHTS, BUDDY?

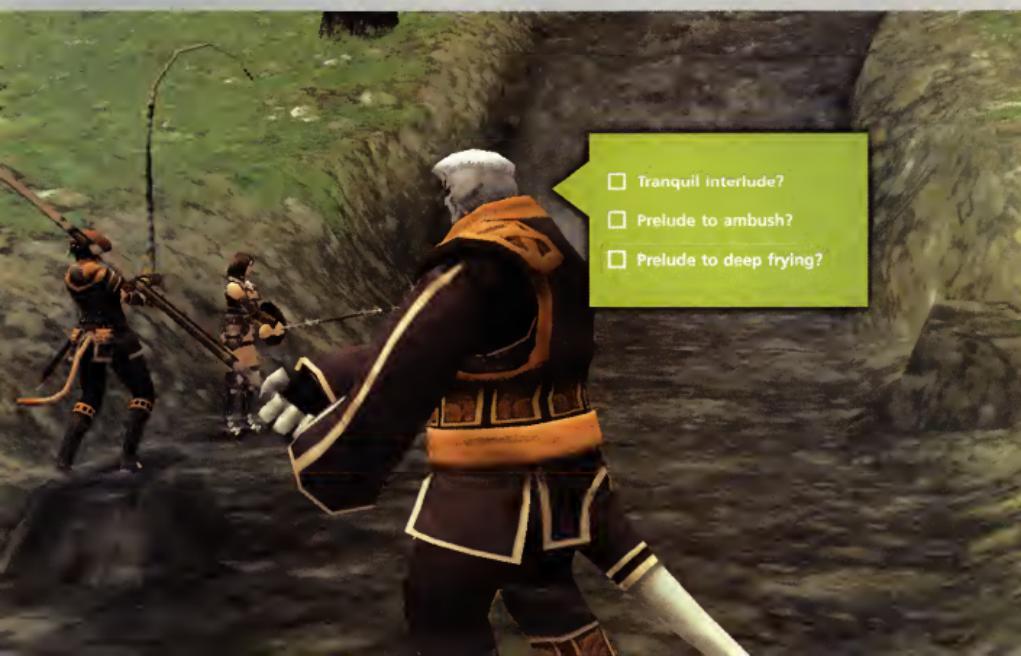
→ Merit badges for comic-book appreciation and videogames mastery go right next to each other on the double-knit XXL sash of the Nerd Scouts. But, strangely, good videogames based on comic books or well-known comic-book superheroes have been few and far between. Then along came the idea of massively multiplayer online role-playing games, which were good. Soon after someone said: "Screw being a level 52 dark elf mage. I want to be a superhero!" And now we have *City of Heroes*.

Currently in development by Cryptic Studios and NCSoft—the people who brought you the fantastically popular (in Korea, at least) *Lineage: The Blood Pledge*—

City of Heroes lets you live out your caped-crusader fantasies in a world populated by other gamers with leopard fetishes. You design your own hero, from your powers (with hundreds to choose from) right down to your own set of custom tights. From there, you go forth into the city to battle evil, either by yourself or with a group of superfriends. Sadly, you won't be able to play as a supervillain—not yet, anyway—but MMO games have a way of evolving over time. Let's hope this one does just that, and in a dastardly direction. → E

GMA SAYS → Could be phenomenal. Could eat a kryptonite sandwich.

→ HOW HOT...



- Tranquill interlude?
- Prelude to ambush?
- Prelude to deep frying?

WRATH UNLEASHED

RELEASE | FEBRUARY

Nostalgia gets game

developers only so far. From *Defender* to *Shmok*, last year's classics updates conclusively proved that great old names can be hard to transform into worthy next-generation games. But *Wrath Unleashed* is a different story, using an unknown name to shamelessly lift and brilliantly update a long-forgotten classic's fantastic gameplay.

Before *Advance Wars* or *Battle Chess*, there was *Archon*, a groundbreaking 1983 fantasy reimagining of chess that placed dragons, golems, wizards, and shapeshifters against each other—first in turn-based strategic positioning, and then in overhead one-on-one action and shooting battles. After a disastrous sequel, *Archon*'s creators went on to create the wildly popular *Star Control* series, and *Archon*

disappeared, leaving legions of fans hoping against hope for a real and worthwhile follow-up.

After 20 years, their prayers have been answered. For all intents and purposes, LucasArts' *Wrath Unleashed* is *Archon*, only with fully interactive battle scenes nearly as beautiful as those in *Final Fantasy X*. Players choose from four deities—earth, fire, water, or air—each commanding an army of creatures inspired by Western and Asian mythologies. Two to four armies face off on battlefields built with hexagons and littered with temples, first moving strategically turn-by-turn across hexes to seize enough temples to win the game.

But *Wrath* dramatically changes once two creatures occupy the same space: Strategy gives way to 3D fighting and shooting action perhaps most

comparable to *Virtua On*. Weaker combatants stick, move, and cast spells from a distance, while stronger ones swing their swords and hammers up close for maximum damage.

The booby-trapped battlefields feature spike pits and varying grades of terrain, adding subtle peril to the button-mashing combat. If you can picture a mix of *Atari's* old fighter *Mace*, *The Dark Age* with *Military Madness* and some beautiful Chinese paintings, you've got the right idea.

For now, we can only say "wow." Well, that and "please cut down the loading times before release." It's taken 20 years—we think it's fair to say no one wants to wait to enjoy this one. ■

GMA SAYS → Please, please publicize this one right. LucasArts. You're our only hope.

→ HOW HOT... 



VAN HESLING

RELEASE | SPRING

THE MONSTER MASH, AS IT SHOULD BE

These days, TV shows feature vampires attending math class and werewolves boogying down at school dances. Sure it's "entertaining," but what ever happened to the good old days when monsters were...well, bad? Vivendi Universal Games plans a return to the true scary spirit with a heart-pounding third-person action game based on the exploits of Van Helsing, the man who kicked off the wood-staking trend. And it's coming out just in time to accompany the forthcoming motion-picture release

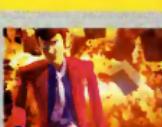
on the same topic.

Set in the macabre world of 19th-century Transylvania, the game finds out-tough guy and stake-in-Dracula's-side Van Helsing facing off against the Count, the Wolfman, and Frankenstein's monster, as well as other classic monsters and some new spooks. But don't expect these beasties to look like lame carnival attractions—each character has been "enhanced" by writer-director Stephen Sommer. According to Lead Designer Alan Tew, Van Helsing, who "carries a

weapons factory in his trench coat," isn't coming to the party unprepared: In addition to his tojo blades, scimitars, and shotgun, there's the oh-so-sweet hand-cranked Gatling gun. X-Men's onscreen Wolverine, Hugh Jackman, stars as the titular hero, which should make for quite an interesting match when he squares off against Wolfman. ■

GMA SAYS → We don't know which is scarier—this game or a bowl of Frankenberry.

→ HOW HOT... 



LUPIN THE 3RD

RELEASE | FEBRUARY

Thanks to the *Cartoon Network* and DVD publisher Pioneer, "the world's most wanted thief" is finally getting his proper respects. Stateside, *Insider* decided to bring this year-old game to North America. Think of it as *Metal Gear Solid*, a stealth-action game in which ridiculous disguises and slapstick comedy play central roles. When it comes to Lupin's pickpocketing abilities, a gaff-glove-style meter determines his success or failure.

RELEASE | SPRING

THE SIMS 2

MASTER PC PUBLISHER ELECTRONIC ARTS DEVELOPER MAXIS

BIRTH. SCHOOL. WORK. DEATH

→ You'd think Maxis would settle for a graphical upgrade to the biggest-selling PC game of all time, release it, and start counting the money. And it is doing that, creating a whole new graphics and lighting engine that brings a new sense of realism to your virtual homes while keeping that weird brand of Sims whimsy (3D farts, vomit, and vivid electrocutions figure heavily in this sequel). The developer just isn't settling for that.

Instead, Maxis has significantly altered the core gameplay by giving every character you create a finite life span. No more treading water in the time stream—every Sim is born, ages, and dies (sometimes naturally). So, instead of managing individual Sims, you'll handle families across multiple generations. Every Sim will

have individual digital DNA, meaning when Sims bump uglies, the resulting Sim will be a unique blend of both parents' physical and mental characteristics. Also, environments will more profoundly affect your Sims, with their childhoods having lasting effects into adulthood.

Another addition to *The Sims 2* is a focus on life moments, key events in a Sim's lifetime that are highlighted by special cinematics. These memories are recorded in a special scrapbook, letting little Timmie Sim revisit his first kiss or the death of his mom (or a delightful, deliciously memorable combination of both). ■

GMA SAYS → Systematic torture and selective breeding of entire families across several generations—what's not to love?

→ HOW HOT... 



- Heraldng impending doom?
- Granting safe passage?
- You must be this tall to ride the chocobo?

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FOR REDEMPTION

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DEATH

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PlayStation 2

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—MATT CAVANAGH, IGN.COM

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REVIEWED THIS ISSUE:

.HACK//QUARANTINE	PS2 052	087 GC	MARIO PARTY 5
ARMED & DANGEROUS	PC/XB 049	080 PC	MAX PAYNE 2: THE FALL OF MAX PAYNE
ARK FATALIS	XB 064	090 GC/PS2/XB	MEOAL OF HONOR: RISING SUN
BACKYARD WRESTLING	PS2/XB 056	086 GC/PS2/XB	MIOWAY ARCAOE TREASURES
BATTLESTAR GALACTICA	PS2/XB 064	080 PS2	MONSTER RANCHER 4
CALL OF DUTY	PC 054	082 XB	NBA INSIDE DRIVE 2004
COMMANDOS 3	PC 054	082 PS2	NBA SHOOTOUT 2004
CRASH NITRO KART RACING	GC/PS2/XB 056	084 PS2	NCAA FINAL FOUR 2004
CRIMSON SKIES: HIGH ROAD TO REVENGE	XB 052	084 PS2/XB	NCAA MARCH MAONESS 2004
CULOCOPT	PS2 052	086 GC/PC/PS2/XB	NEED FOR SPEED: UNDERGROUND
DANCE DANCE REVOLUTION ULTRAMIX	XB 064	084 XB	NHL RIVALS
DRAGON BALL Z: BUOKAI 2	PS2 056	047 XB	NINJA GAIDEN
DUNGEONS & DRAGONS: TEMPLE OF ELEMENTAL EVIL	PC 054	076 XB	PROJECT GOTHAM RACING
FINAL FANTASY XI	PC/PS2 088	070 GC/PS2/XB	PRINCE OF PERSIA
GRABBED BY THE GHOULIES	XB 068	078 XB	RAINBOW SIX 3
GRAND THEFT AUTO DOUBLE PACK	PS2/XB 068	086 PS2	ROAD TRIP: ARCADE EDITION
HARRY POTTER & THE SORCERER'S STONE	GC/PS2/XB 068	090 XB	SEGA GT ONLINE
I-NINJA	GC/PS2/XB 072	093 GBA	SHINING SOUL 2
007: EVERYTHING OR NOTHING	GC/PC/PS2/XB 093	090 PS2	SPACE CHANNEL 5
KING OF FIGHTERS 2001/2002	PS2 072	091 GC/PS2/XB	SPAWN: ARMAGEDDON
KYA: DARK LINEAGE	PS2 072	086 GC/PS2/XB	SPONGEBOB SQUAREPANTS
LEGACY OF KAIN: DEFIANCE	PS2/XB 074	086 GC/PS2/XB	THE HOBBIT
LORO OF THE RINGS: RETURN OF THE KING	GC/PC/PS2/XB 074	087 GC/PS2/XB	TRUE CRIME: STREETS OF L.A.
MAGIC THE GATHERING: BATTLEGROUNDS	PC/XB 086	091 PS2	VIRTUAL-ON MARZ
MARIO & LUIGI	GBA 093	092 PS2	WWF SMACKDOWN! HERE COMES THE PAIN
MARIO KART: DOUBLE DASH	GC 088	092 PS2/XB	WHIPLASH

HOW WE RATE

YOUR GUIDE TO THE GMR SCORING SYSTEM

This holiday season, fret not whether Santa deems you naughty or nice. Worry about whether GMR says "verily" to—or drops the hammer on—your software choice. After all, we want you to have a happy holiday, and choosing the digital equivalent of coal in your stocking could spoil your figgy pudding. Ho ho ho!

1 KING OF CRAP 2 WRSTEED 3 BROKEN 4 MEDIOCRE 5 AVERAGE 6 GOOD STUFF 7 RECOMMENDED 8 EXCELLENT 9 MUST-HAVE 10 TIMELESS CLASSIC

WARNING! WHERE MULTIPLE VERSIONS OF A GAME ARE REVIEWED, GMR WILL MENTION DIFFERENCES ONLY IF THEY SIGNIFICANTLY AFFECT THE GAMEPLAY.



NINJA GAIDEN

VENGEANCE IS A DISH BEST SERVED NINJA-HOT. HOT. HOT.

MATURE | XBOX

PUBLISHED: EDDIE
DEVELOPED: TEAM NINJA
PRICE: £39.99
RELEASE: 12/10/08
PLAYERS: 1
GENRE: JAPAN

→ If Team Ninja's dalliance in volleyball was to show the world that its talents went beyond fighting games, then its action-adventure title *Ninja Gaiden* is proof positive that its time away from brawlers has been well spent. Emphatically, *Ninja Gaiden* makes its case as the action game to beat, a testament to the title's beauty, depth, and playability.

As Ryu Hayabusa, you are set on a path to avenge your clan's destruction at the hands of the Vigor Empire. During an extensive journey that sends

you to Hell and back, you'll encounter allies in the mysterious Rachel and messenger (and *DOA* mainstay) Ayane.

As you begin the game, your offense consists merely of a katana and unlimited shuriken. As you run, jump, roll, and flip through the game, making your way past brutal swarms of fast-moving enemies (no shuffling zombards here) and some of the most insane boss encounters ever seen, you'll slowly but surely beef up your arsenal with brutal new weapons.

Besides a selection of swords (some

can be found, others can be purchased and upgraded from in-game merchant Muramasa), Ryu will also find nunchucks, bows and arrows, a massive throwing star, exploding shurikens, a giant warhammer, a Vigor flail (lethal twin sickles), a harpoon gun, and a few other nifty unlockable surprises. And then there's the wide array of imposing, elemental "nindo" attacks.

At nearly every step of the way awaits a quartet of beautifully rendered hostiles upon which to unleash your wrath. Enemies come in all shapes →





→ and sizes via land, sea, and air, making life more difficult than you can imagine. Thankfully, Ryu—no cheerleader for stealth operations—is prepped at all times for maximum combat, and this is where *Ninja Gaiden* shines. While button mashers can eke their way through the game, gamers who learn the ins and outs of each weapon's deep move set will find a much more rewarding experience. As your proficiency grows, and as you upgrade each weapon, you'll eventually turn Ryu into a killing machine. Heads will roll, literally.

When you learn to use the environments for maximum effect (wall

running, charge-up moves, back flips off pillars, etc.), the game takes on a visceral, electrifying quality. Ryu's capabilities are as deep and complex as those of any *Soul Calibur II* character. And in 16 enormous levels packed with puzzles, action, and secrets, gamers will find Gaiden to be a high-impact experience from its tragic opening to its satisfying, bittersweet curtain call.

If the game stumbles anywhere, it's in its few cut-and-paste objectives (e.g., find the key, unlock the door) and level designs so ambitious, it's often difficult to keep one's bearing. But when you consider *Ninja Gaiden*'s sheer thrill power, combined with the fact that it's

the best-looking videogame around, these are minor gripes.

While it might intimidate casual gamers, the hardcore will eat this up. *Ninja Gaiden* is the work of developers at the peak of their powers and is, pound for pound, light years beyond anything else in the category. ←

James Mielke

GMR

9/10

SANDINE
BETTER THAN: *DEVIL MAY CRY*
LESS PERVERSE THAN: *DOA EXTREME BEACH VOLLEYBALL*
WAIT FOR IT: *ONINUSHIA 3*

2ND OPINION

With matchless grace and beauty, *Ninja Gaiden* deftly enables this generation of thrill-seeking gamers to wean on the work of Miller, Kosugi, and Ueda. Let's get to the meat of it: stockings split-toed stockings and live out their wildest, most violent fleet-footed fantasies. ←
—David Chen



Send your enemies a spicy treat in the form of souped-up Vindalo Rockets, or give this uppity boss (above) a wake-up call courtesy of your Sherman Personal Mortar. Unlike other games' joke weapons, A&D's arsenal packs a punch.

ARMED & DANGEROUS

MADNESS SHALL ENSUE

PUBLISHER: ELECTRONIC
DEVELOPER: PLANET ROM
PRICE: \$49.99
RELEASE: NOVEMBER 2003
PLAYERS: 1
ORIGIN: CANADA

TEEN | XBOX [REVIEWED] | PC
→ "So, a Scottish mole, a criminal mastermind, a tea-drinking robot gladiator, and a glass-eyed madman all walk into a bar." Sounds like some sort of crap joke, doesn't it? Well, the joke is on you because this fabulous foursome comprises the principal cast of one of the year's biggest surprises: *Armed & Dangerous*.

A stellar third-person shooter that pulses with feverish invention, *A&D* welds together top-notch controls, a truly mental plot, and some of the most strategic gunplay to hit consoles in ages. Unlike today's typical action hero, *A&D*'s leading man, Rome, prefers his arsenal with a dash of lunacy, please. How else could you

describe weapons like the Vindalo Rocket Launcher (Indian, anyone?) or the Land Shark Gun, which literally fires man-eating sharks to clear a tasty path through Rome's enemies?

The game is extremely linear and can occasionally be exceptionally challenging, but it's never the kind of difficulty that makes you want to break things. You may replay a stage a dozen times trying to figure out how best to contend with the horde of enemies blocking your path, but the process of doing so is always fun. Why? Because the interactive, highly destructible environments (hint: send the boulders tumbling) and open-ended ways in which you can complete a level give

each stage loads of replay value.

That *A&D* features inspired Monty Python-esque voice acting (British accents are, by default, funny), a footlocker full of secrets, and some of the most smartly designed characters around gives gamers reason both to celebrate and to pray for a much-deserved sequel. Sheer madness. **IC**

—James Mielke

2ND. OPINION

It's not very often that a game makes you laugh, shout something obscene, throw the controller down, pick it up, laugh your ass off, shout more obscenities, and then get struck right back in the action over and over and over. It's old school, and it's deignit. **IC**

—Simon Cox



GMR 9/10
MAGNIFICENT BASTARD
BETTER THAN GIANTS, CITIZEN KABUTO
CRAZIER THAN MEK'S
ALSO TRY MAX PAYNE 2, THE FALL OF MAX PAYNE

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CRIMSON SKIES: HIGH ROAD TO REVENGE

ROCKETS' RED GLARE

TEEN | XB

→ The series' debut in the world of console air-combat sims, *Crimson Skies* is a high-flying rocketeer of a game that offers both old-fashioned entertainment and hardcore rat-a-tat-thrills.

By wrapping itself in an alternate 1930s universe, *Skies* evokes an atmosphere lacking in most of today's F-16-centric shooters. By adding a story line that brings each of its characters to life, the game begins as yet another anonymous flyer but ends up as something with style. Helping matters is a stable of wicked ship designs that are equal parts fantasy and reality.

Aesthetics aside, it is *Skies* gameplay that wins the day. Tight, responsive controls that owe more to *After Burner* than *Combat Flight Simulator* ensure that even the greenest air jockey will be yanking barrel rolls with the best of them in no time. A tangible difference in each

ship's weapons and handling means that a plane to suit any player's style is always within reach. Plus, the diversity of each area gives a feeling of actual progress. What keeps *Skies* from being too frustrating, though, besides a nice variety in mission objectives, is the considerate collision detection and checkpoint system. Still, *Skies* is somewhat lacking.

The game allows only one overall upgrade per plane and lacks any sort of B-52 bomber-style skin customization (no pinup girls? For shame!), let alone specific parts upgrades. Likewise, beyond the quickly beaten story mode (which can be finished in a day), the only recourse is to hit up the multiplayer options (both splitscreen and online).

Admittedly, the online play is great, supporting up to 16 players and a wealth of game modes (capture the flag, etc.) that, while familiar in theme,

play unlike anything else you've ever tried. Yet, it would have been great if there were other single-player activities, like a survival mode.

Still, what's offered makes for great fun for however long you make it last; the game is also a great foundation upon which to build. But whoever designed the final level (filled with screen-obscuring lightning attacks) and behemoth boss is a cruel, cruel person indeed. →

—James Mielke



PC/MAC MICROSOFT GAMES
DEV TASA STUDIOS
REL AVAILABLE NOW
PRICE \$19.99
PLAYERS 1-4 (1-16 ONLINE)
GENRE USA

MO TURBINE FUN

GMR 8TH

BETTER THAN LETHAL SKIES II
NOT AS GOOD AS ACE COMBAT 4
WAIT FOR IT: AIR FORCE DELTA STRIKE

.HACK//QUARANTINE

ALL THINGS COME TO AN END

TEEN | PS2

→ Writing a review of *.Hack//Quarantine* from a "should you buy this or not" standpoint is silly. If you bought the first three games, why wouldn't you see how the story ends? And if you didn't, why would you start with the last chapter? On top of this is the problem that there's nothing to say about this chapter that hasn't been said before. Its strengths and weaknesses as a game are widely known.

So, all that's left is to look back on the series as a whole and evaluate the experiment. It's certainly been an unqualified financial success for Bandai, as the company gets four

times the profit from an investment of maybe one-and-a-half games' worth of development. From a player's standpoint, though, it's a little less exciting. The satisfying conclusion you get here is a good payoff, but a lot of fat could have been cut to get the series down to three games. The gameplay, although strong at first, wasn't meant to be stretched this thin; if you're someone who intends to attempt all four games at a stretch, prepare for plenty of tedium to set in halfway through. Consider the rating below to be a summing-up of the whole series to date. →

—Nich Maragos



FOR RUMI
DEV CYBERCONNECT
REL DECEMBER 2003
PRICE \$49.99
PLAYERS 1
GENRE JAPAN

FURBALL

GMR 7TH

BETTER THAN .HACK//LEGEND OF THE TWILIGHT
NOT AS GOOD AS .HACK//SIGN
INEVITABLY THERE WILL BE .HACK//RELAPSE

CULDCEPT

WE'VE RUN OUT OF CARD-GAME JOKES

TEEN | PS2

→ A cult favorite in Japan since the Sega Saturn days, *Culdcept* deftly blends *Monopoly* with *Magic: The Gathering*, creating one incredibly playable and addictive game.

Like *Monopoly*, you move around a board, capturing land until you've amassed enough mana to win. You occupy spots with summoned creatures (think of them as fighting hotels), which your opponent will have to defeat in card battles to avoid a mana toll. With 480 beautifully illustrated cards to collect and 42 boards to play on, the game has limitless play potential—just ask players on the Japanese tournament circuit, established in 1997.

The best board game and card game of this generation, *Culdcept* features simple, deep, addictive gameplay that's topped off with great four-player multiplayer support. Snap it up before it's gone. →

—Darryl Vassar

PC/MAC INTERCHANNEL
DEV DAVID SOFT
REL NOVEMBER 2003
PRICE \$29.99
PLAYERS 1-4
GENRE JAPAN

GMR 8TH

BETTER THAN YU-GI-OH! BATTLE OF THE ROSES
BUT NOT SINK VS. CAPCOM CARDFIGHTER'S CLASH
WAIT FOR IT: PHANTOM DUST



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FOR YOU ARE THE FUTURE GUARDIANS OF THE GALAXY.



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TEEN
T
Violence
ESRB CONTENT RATING www.esrb.org



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COMMANDOS 3

NOT QUITE THEIR FINEST HOUR

MATURE | PC

→ The idea is great: Take a dirty half-dozen commandos, each with his own specialty, and have them work together to oppose der Führer and his forces in a squad-based real-time puzzle game.

The first two games in the series are classics. Each looked good for its time, and both are notoriously tough. Once again, Eidos delivers with the graphics and even throws in a cool multiplayer mode. But this game is too difficult. Hell, we got frustrated on the tutorial. Not a good sign.

By far the biggest problem is that you'll be fighting the camera controls

as much as the Nazis. From the first mission in Stalingrad, you'll know you're in for trouble. You have to race through cramped city streets to locate and take out a sniper, and you need to spin the camera to avoid getting shot. But buildings obscure your view, and the Germans have an easier time spotting your characters than you do. Couple that with the fact that many of the hotkeys that make previous games manageable have been stripped out and you've got some serious trouble on your hands. Overall, a setback to Eidos' war efforts. **IC**

—Darren Gladstone



PC EDITION
DEV: PGSS STUDIOS
RELEASED NOW
PRICING: \$39.99
PLAYERS: 1-2
RATING: SPUR

GMR 5/10

BETTER THAN DESPERADOS
NOT AS GOOD AS: COMMANDOS 1 AND 2
WAIT FOR IT: UDO, AFTERMATH

D&D: TEMPLE OF ELEMENTAL EVIL

GOT YOU STUCK ON THE REALNESS

TEEN | PC

→ For the uninitiated, playing *Temple of Elemental Evil* is akin to listening to a group of hardcore *D&D* nerds at the next table go on and on about their games: They are impassioned, animated, and utterly incomprehensible. For those who aren't already familiar with *D&D*'s rules, a lot of *TOEE* is going to seem like arcane nonsense.

But those who know what's up (even a little) are in store for a substantial, challenging, and deep

experience. The turn-based combat is fast paced, precise, and brutal—they throw the whole freaking Monster Manual at you, and the numbers these monsters roll are crazy deep. But luckily, your fighters will have the combat feats to crack heads, and your wizards will have the area-of-effect spells to burn it up. Suffice it to say, this is straight *D&D*, with the latest rules thoroughly implemented. Only serious *D&D*-heads need apply. **IC**

—Miguel Lopez



PC EDITION
DEV: IRONIC GAMES
RELEASED NOW
PRICING: \$39.99
PLAYERS: 1
RATING: ESRB: E10+

GMR 7/10

BETTER THAN: POOL OF RAGNAROK
WORSE THAN: BALDR'S GATE II
NOT QUITE: NEW-SCHOOL GOLDBOX



CALL OF DUTY

ONCE AGAIN, INTO THE BREACH

TEEN | PC

→ The makers of the new WWII-themed first-person shooter *Call of Duty* shouldn't be surprised if their game is compared to EA's *Medal of Honor* series. After all, developer Infinity Ward is loaded with ex-2015 employees, the people who created *Medal of Honor*. And thematically, it's a very similar game. But comparing the two is like comparing apples and oranges; *COD* does some things well that *MOH* doesn't and vice versa.

What *COD* does very well is give gamers a visceral re-creation of combat that makes you feel less like a Nazi-slaughtering superman and more like a simple soldier vulnerable to every random piece of hot lead flying through the air. That's not to say a single bullet can kill you. There are plenty of abstractions to make this a game and not a simulator. But thanks to some very clever scripting, A.I., and level design, *COD* re-creates the foggy randomness of war and makes you feel as if you were right in the middle of a hairy firefight.

That's when the game is at its best. Sometimes, it's less than that, and it feels like a stock shooter. It doesn't help that not much is offered in the way of eye candy. *COD* uses a modified version of the *Quake III* graphics engine, code

that's been around for four years—

—aons in game development time.

There's also a lack of cohesion in the ambitious story line, which should be one of the game's strong points. Instead of crammering three divergent threads into one game, the developers should have split them up. The Russian campaign could have stood on its own, but it feels like an afterthought. Too bad, because the great moments of intense combat that *COD* gives gamers don't add up to a great game; they result in a mess. **IC**

—Tom Price

PC EDITION
DEV: INFINITY WARD
RELEASED NOW
PRICING: \$49.99
PLAYERS: 1
RATING: ESRB: T

GMR 7/10

BETTER THAN: RETURN TO CASTLE WOLFENSTEIN
NOT AS GOOD AS: HIGH-ADDED ASSAULT
WAIT FOR IT: HIGH-PACIFIC ASSAULT



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MARIO & LUIGI
SUPERSTAR SAGA



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CRASH NITRO KART RACING

LET'S DO THE TIME WARP. AGAIN

TEEN | PS2 (REVIEWED) | EC | X

→ Before wasting 50 bucks on this lukewarm, been-there done-that kart racer, consider this: With that money, you're halfway toward owning a GameCube, which hosts the only kart game in town worth playing. Cross-platform comparisons might not be fair, but it's hard to tolerate *Crash NKR*'s constant load times, clumsy power-up system, and sluggish multiplayer mode when there's a game on store shelves that doesn't have these problems.

The developers have attempted to

replicate *Crash Team Racing* (the PS1 original) to a fault. The biggest problem with the first game has not been fixed: You are still forced to link powerslides to win. What's worse, this new installment actually encourages you to try powersliding across the entire course, which means that if you want to reach top speed, you have to drive at a 45-degree angle during the whole race. Ugh. The karts' ability to glide on certain surfaces adds nothing to the proceedings, and the new stages are uninspired. It's technically competent,

but *Crash NKR* does not offer a gaming experience anyone would call fun. ■

Ethan Einhorn

PS2 | WII | UNIVERSAL
REL. NOVEMBER 2006
PLAYERS 1-4
PRICE \$49.99
RATED E.U.
COUNTRY U.S.A.

GMR 4/10
ROADKILL

BETTER THAN: FREAKY FLYERS
NOT AS GOOD AS: MARIO KART DOUBLE DASH!
WAIT FOR IT: A DECENT NEW CRASH GAME

BACKYARD WRESTLING

BUSINESS IN FRONT. PARTY IN BACK

MATURE | PS2 (REVIEWED) | XBOX

→ It's there in black-and-white, right on the front of the damn box: "Don't Try This at Home!" It can't be any clearer! Eidos can't believe it made this game, much less think anyone will pay for it. Seriously, don't be tempted to suffer through this painful experience, brought to you by the team that developed *Wu-Tang: Shaolin Style*.

It's not an altogether bad idea—you control fighters in a trailer-park-friendly wrestling league who beat the living crap out of one another in their backyards. The problem comes when you actually try to play.

The DVDs upon which the game is based are shocking, but so is the unpolished turd that is *Backyard's* execution. The characters—whether prefab or custom—are stiff as boards, break into full sprints, and are just generally tough to control. Each

has his own specialty moves, but they all feel the same—the slender trailer-trash vixens handle just like the beer-swilling superheroes.

It also doesn't help that though there are a lot of things you can interact with in the environment, the physics are totally whacked. In most cases, you don't feel the impact. Kitana Baker gets smashed with a bat by Rude Boy and what happens? She shrugs it off. A basketball bounces on her head and she's down for the count. Yeah, right.

And now comes our last chance to crack a joke about dumb rednecks: In one fight against Rude Boy, the idiotic A.I. has the digitized dumbass running into a ladder. He can't move up or around it, he just runs in place and takes a beating. Look, this fight was over before it even started. ■

—Darren Gladstone



PS2 | EIDOS INTERACTIVE
REL. NOVEMBER 2006
PLAYERS 1-2
PRICE \$39.99
RATED T
COUNTRY U.S.A.

MULLET OVER
3/10

BETTER THAN: A JERRY SPRINGER MARATHON
NOT AS GOOD AS: JUST ABOUT ANY PRINTING GAME
WASH OUT THE TASTE WITH: A CASE OF FATEST BLUE RIBBON

DRAGON BALL Z: BUDOKAI 2

YOU'LL BUY IT NO MATTER WHAT WE SAY

TEEN | PS2

→ Members of the *Dragon Ball Z* cult would purchase cat barf if it came in a container with an illustration of Goku on the lid, so last year's *Budokai* was a wonderful surprise. Atari delivered a solid *DBZ* game, despite knowing it didn't have to, and now it's delivered a markedly improved sequel. Where is this respect for the fans coming from???

The most noticeable change in *B2* is the cel-shaded character design, which makes perfect sense for an anime tie-in—and it looks fantastic. Another major alteration is the brand-new story mode, in which you move Goku and a

partner of his choice around a series of Mario Party-ish game boards. While this sequence isn't as strategic as it could've or should've been, it's good fun and blessedly nonlinear.

Other additions include a dozen new characters, new fusion and absorption attacks, and twice as many ability-bestowing capsules. The controls themselves remain unchanged, with one button each for punching, kicking, blocking, and ki. Depthwise, in no way does the game compare to *Soul Calibur II* or *VF4* Evo, but it's not trying to.

Budokai 2 would be a best-seller even if the DVD contained only obscene

Piccolo fan art; however, this is the best *DBZ* game yet. It's a fighter with enough personality and depth to appeal even to all seven nonfans of the franchise. ■

—Zach Meston

PS2 | JAPAN
REL. NOV. 2006
PLAYERS 1-2
PRICE \$49.99
RATED T
COUNTRY JAPAN

GMR 7/10
HERCULES/IDOUS

BETTER THAN: BLOODY ROAR 4
NOT AS GOOD AS: SOUL CALIBUR II
WAIT FOR IT: DUNGEON LORDS



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Animated Blood
Violence



PlayStation 2

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→ Notice Baby Mario leaning into the turn? Ignoring the potentially universe-shattering paradox of Mario and Baby Mario on the same team, that's the new powerslide system in action. It's easy enough with one player, but when two players are racing, it's a challenge to get the timing just right. The payoff, of course, is a much faster slide that can be performed multiple times during a turn. And if Baby Mario gets bored, he can switch positions with his future self and take over the unlicensed driving duties.



MARIO KART: DOUBLE DASH

AIN'T IT FUNNY HOW TIME SLIPS AWAY?

EVERYONE | GC

PUBLISHER: NINTENDO
DEVELOPER: NINTENDO
PRICE: \$49.99
RELEASE: AVAILABLE NOW
PLAYERS: 1-4
GENRE: JAPAN



→ Yeah, we'll say it: *Mario Kart: Double Dash* is the most fun you'll have with a game this year. And probably next year. And maybe even the year after that. It's not the same kind of fun as, say, spending 80 hours on a game so your purple mage reaches level 67 and unlocks a totally badass poison spell, nor is it the same kind of fun you get from collecting 100 golden whizbits in the abandoned amusement park. No, this is the kind of fun where the phrase "OK, one more game" means you're sitting on the couch for at least two more hours—*Double Dash* is that good.

But if you're a Mario Kart fan, you already know this. So, why bother

upgrading when *Mario Kart 64* still rests comfortably in the cartridge slot? Two words: cooperative driving. *Double Dash*'s dual-driver system might seem needlessly complicated at first, but once you get the hang of vehicle attributes, synchronized powersliding, and item exchanges, the finer nuances reveal themselves, and it's hard to go back to the plain ol' karts of yesterday.

But wait, there's more, including a highly addictive battle mode called Bob-omb Blast, some of the series' best course designs, character-specific weapons, three types of karts, and a wealth of unlockable modes, tracks, karts, and characters.

Like a well-timed lightning-bolt

strike, *Mario Kart: Double Dash* eliminates any lingering (and foolish) doubts that Nintendo has lost its ability to make truly outstanding videogames. It's one of the best games of the year because it succeeds as a reminder of what this whole gaming thing is supposed to be about in the first place: pure, unfiltered fun. **KE**

—Andrew Pfister

2ND. OPINION

Nintendo perfects upon brilliance with *Double Dash*—the addition of double-tear driving/shooting adds just enough complexity to challenge even the most untrained vets to re-learn the art of karting. The visuals and sounds won't blow you away but you'll be too busy being mind-searingly addicted to care. **KE**

—Shane Bettenhausen, *EGM*

GMR 10/10

NOT AS GOOD AS WINNING THE LOTTERY
SO MUCH BETTER THAN CRASH NITRO KART
WAIT FOR IT. NO LONGER

from conception to reality

"GBA eat your heart out."
Official XBOX Magazine July, 2003

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MAX PAYNE 2 NOBODY SNUGGLES WITH MAX PAYNE

MATURE | PC

In Max Payne's world, words are cheap. So too are bullets, bravado, and scum—both the sort that spatters New York streets and the two-legged variety. And in *The Fall of Max Payne*, the succinct sequel to Rockstar Games' high-octane hit, all are dispensed frequently.

The first Payne's claim to fame—aside from the painfully pinched visage of its hero—is its signature bullet-time effect, which deftly tapped into that ongoing, gloriously gratuitous Matrix-inspired slow-mo craze and elevated the game to cult status. Here, bullet time's back, as are the gorgeous, gritty graphics, the gratuitous gunplay, and the hilariously ham-fisted storytelling

approach (this last aspect, admittedly, has a more self-consciously ironic tone, but it's still awkward and absolutely disposable).

A chapter in the third act entitled "That old familiar feeling" is meant to be an in-joke, but it's also a tellingly apt description for the game. Quite simply, the core experience remains largely unchanged: Watch the graphic-novel-style interludes (inarrated with all the emotion of a painkiller addict); maneuver Max through a handful of seedy locales, shooting any and everything; stop only to hit the Quick-Save key.

Improvements to the formula include a new physics engine, better friend and foe A.I., and the opportunity to play as femme fatale Mona Sax, but we'd be hard-pressed to stake the claim that any of these add significantly to the first game's singularly terse thrill. Die-hard Max Payne fans (and there are plenty) couldn't ask for more; more casual shoppers most certainly should. **KE**

—David Chen



PRO: ROCKSTAR GAMES
DEY: REMOTE ENTERTAINMENT
RE: AVAILABLE NOW

GMR 7/10

BETTER THAN MAX PAYNE
WORSE THAN MAX PAYNE
WAIT FOR IT DEAD TO RIGHTS 2



MONSTER RANCHER 4 MORE MONSTERS-MORE FUN

EVERYONE | PS2

► Monster-nurturing simulations don't get much better than the *Monster Rancher* series. *Monster Rancher 4* includes all the well-loved features of its predecessors (the monster creation and training, gladiatorial combat between creatures, etc.) and adds new ones that make the game markedly different from *Rancher 1, 2, and 3*.

This time around, players can raise and control more than one monster at a time. Also, a player's character can now interact directly with his monsters, with the unfashionably dressed, player-controlled, wailfish trainer lad running around on the monster ranch issuing praise or criticism to the beasts, feeding them, and giving them special objects. Tecmo has also replaced *Rancher's* turn-based site exploration with real-time dungeon crawling.

These improvements (coupled with graphical tweaks that make the monsters look sharper and the static talking heads riddling the game appear as well-drawn anime figures) propel *4* to the top of the *Rancher* ladder. Because players of early

versions are able to control only one monster at a time, building up a good cash supply is difficult. In *4*, players can have one monster a week fight in tournaments and (hopefully) generate cash in the process. By upping the number of creatures in a stable, Tecmo has dramatically quickened the game's pace, with only a minimal trade-off in terms of the number of menus a trainer must plod through. With the new dungeons, there's reason for muted celebration; real-time exploration and random battles work well, but the dungeons are simplistic and hold little challenge.

Rancher 4 is the friend—call him Yappy McChattington—who will not shut his pie hole. As is the case with its brethren, this game throws up endless talking heads to slow down the proceedings. In a game that's already menu-heavy and reliant on week-by-week planning, Tecmo should have worried more about pacing and less about telling players in 30 words what they should know five. Interesting takes an almost monster hit here. **KE**

—Greg Orlando



PUB TECHNO
REV TECHNO
RE: AVAILABLE NOW

GMR 7/10

BETTER THAN: MONSTER RANCHER 3
WORSE THAN:
WAIT FOR IT: KAMEO



(Wait 'til you see the one left in your pants.)

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Strong Language
Violence



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• REC

THEY JUST KILLED CASH.
NOW THEY WANT TO KILL HIM AGAIN.

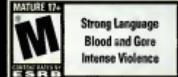
AMERICA IS FULL OF RUN DOWN, BROKEN RUST-BELT TOWNS WHERE NOBODY CARES AND ANYTHING GOES.
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THE ULTIMATE RUSH IS THE POWER TO GRANT LIFE AND TAKE IT AWAY, FOR SPORT. THIS TIME JAMES EARL CASH, YOU ARE THE SPORT.
THEY GAVE YOU YOUR LIFE BACK. NOW, THEY ARE GOING TO HUNT YOU DOWN.

YOU AWARE TO THE SOUND OF YOUR OWN PANICKED BREATH.

YOU MUST RUN, HIDE AND FIGHT TO SURVIVE.

IF YOU CAN STAY ALIVE LONG ENOUGH, YOU MAY FIND OUT WHO DID THIS TO YOU.

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IN STORES NOW!



PlayStation 2

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78

MANHUNT

REC
SAVE



WWW.ROCKSTARGAMES.COM/MANHUNT



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BATTLESTAR GALACTICA

WHEN STARBUCK WAS MORE THAN COFFEE

TEEN | XB [REVIEWED] | PS2

Despite concerted efforts, mankind has yet to kill the '70s. The decade, with its endless cheese and camp, keeps returning from its grave with the frequency and intensity of movie slasher Jason Voorhees. This time, Vivendi Universal and Warthog dredge up *Battlestar Galactica* [a beloved but ultimately junky TV show about some humans and the robots who try to kill them] for some videogame mayhem.

As nostalgia, *Battlestar Galactica* works perfectly, bringing the show's space-based combat to life. Controls are simple to use and easy to master; players are free to immerse themselves in the plot, which stars a young Adama, future captain of the Galactica.

As a third-person space shooter, *Galactica* barely holds its own. The game saves only during specific points, and this is problematic because missions are often strung together. The opening sequence tasks players with

blunting a Cylon attack, defending the Galactica's bridge, attacking a series of satellites shielding a generator, defending a wingman, knocking out the generator, destroying an asteroid base, and then escaping the blast. One misstep ensures players have to start over from square one; Galactica subscribes to perfection or bust, potholing the fun and giving everyone yet another reason to hate the 1970s. **EE**

—Greg Orlando

BY: HYDRA UNIVERSAL GAMES

PRICE: \$19.99

PLAYERS: 1

GENRE: SHOOTER

GMR

DIG IT, DADDY

6/10

BETTER THAN: ST. RICKY & HUTCH
NOT AS GOOD: THE COLONY MARS SERIES
WAIT FOR IT: BLACK ROBINS IN THE 21ST CENTURY THE GAME



ARX FATALIS

LOOKS LIKE AN ORC PLAYS LIKE A DREAM

MATURE | XB

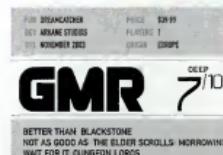
Originally released for PC in late 2002, *Arx Fatalis* is a first-person real-time RPG set in an atmospheric, subterranean setting. Much of the game's pleasure is had by simply stumbling around and getting lost in its architectural splendor. The exceedingly angular graphics are definitely not optimized for Xbox, but their unique artistic flavor makes up for it; this art wouldn't be out of place in an issue of *Heavy Metal*.

Arx Fatalis' best feature—inspired, like almost everything else in the game, by the PC classic *Ultima Underworld*—is the ability to pick up and use almost everything you see,

from wooden chairs to healing herbs. Much of the game's puzzle solving requires an equal amount of careful exploration and item manipulation. The real-time combat and spellcasting are visceral highlights, with a multitude of attack and death animations. Also, your enemies are smart enough to run like hell if they're about to croak.

With its open-ended structure and unusual story line, *Arx Fatalis* is the polar opposite of traditional console RPGs, and that's why I like it so much. Put on your RPG beer goggles and you'll find a remarkable game world beneath the rough presentation. **EE**

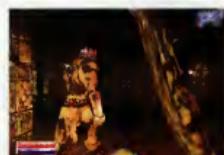
—Zach Meston



GMR

DEEP

BETTER THAN: BLACKSTONE
NOT AS GOOD: THE ELDER SCROLLS: HOLLOWAY
WAIT FOR IT: CUNGEON LOKOS



DDR ULTRAMIX

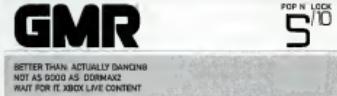
I LIKE THE WAY YOU MOVE

EVERYONE | XB

The potential fan base for *DDR* on Xbox is questionable at best, making *DDR Ultramix*' lackluster showing disappointing—but not entirely surprising. A balanced selection of varied tunes is critical to any music/rhythm game, and this is where *Ultramix* seriously falters: There are no more than a handful of truly danceable tracks. The rest are either slow, boring, or both.

An appreciated addition is challenge mode, creating a new form of difficulty other than ungodly fast steps. One challenge might require completing a song while the steps and music are out of sync. *Ultramix* also supports Xbox Live and real time chat. Plus, Konami promises to release new (hopefully better) tracks through the service. In spite of these nifty features, stick with the PS2 releases! **EE**

—Patrick Klepek



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sweat on every brow of the minions
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NEED FOR SPEED: UNDERGROUND

LIKE FIBERGLASS TIGERS. READY TO POUNCE

EVERYONE | PS2 [REVIEWED] | XBOX | GC | PC



→ *Need for Speed: Underground* is the game every other racer wishes it could be. Combining the reckless, breakneck speed and high-impact collisions of *Burnout* with the neon-tipped street culture of *Fast and the Furious* (and, more specifically, *Midnight Club II*), *Underground* is the new definition of white-knuckle.

Like an angry 12-cylinder, 485-horsepower Frankenstein, *Underground* is much more than the sum of its electrifying parts. Taking a distinct detour from the usual NFS drift of encasing gamers in the world's most exotic cars, the game focuses on the affordable, highly customizable cars (Honda Civics, Ford Focuses, etc.) available to nearly any would-be street racer.

In the game's principal *Underground* mode, you attempt to conquer 100-plus challenges on the streets of a gorgeous but fictitious city. In the game's many cut-scenes, you're continually encouraged by a CG hottie [Samantha], and your goal is to make it to the end of this tremendous string of street-level challenges, with rivals lurking around every corner.

Paving the way toward your objectives are an endless procession of parts, upgrades, and vehicular adornments (vinyls, decals, paint types, etc.). A fancier shell equates to a better reputation, so enhancing the look of your ride is just as important as upgrading its guts. Fortunately, *Underground* has dozens of parts and pieces to choose from and even special events in which you earn unique parts or decals. Tricking out your ride is cool enough in the context of the single-player game, but when you get to parade your wheels in the online arena (alas, for PS2 only), it's even more significant.

And that's on top of what has to be the most thrilling racing experience since the dawn of *Ridge Racer*. An amalgam of Tokyo, New York, and San Francisco, *Underground*'s single city is an all-in-one vehicular playground. Tracks are sectioned off in ways best-

suited to each specific type of event. Elimination contests, drag-strip races, drift competitions, and dead sprints from A to B all take place in overlapping parts of the city, but each event retains its own feel.

The city itself is stunning to behold, but it's even more fun to drive in, with each lengthy course featuring loads of hidden shortcuts à la *Beetle Adventure Racing* and high-speed jumps. Races always take place at night on slightly slick roads, adding a sense of danger lacking in most other high-speed contests. Ironically, the city is almost too shiny and wet, often making it difficult to gauge upcoming turns, thanks to the ever-present glare and reflection.

Another knock against *Underground* is the lack of a garage—you cultivate only one car at a time, and the selection of models is fairly limited. A second true environment to race in would have been welcome as well, since the 100-plus *Underground* challenges (against particularly tough CPU opponents) become somewhat redundant, despite their variety. But these are minor gripes.

That sound you hear is *Underground* landing the knockout punch (while wearing silk gloves). It doesn't make you change your tires every five seconds like in *Sega GT*, and it doesn't require a physics degree to control (ahem, *Gran Turismo*). The in-game traffic gives it the pulse *Project Gotham Racing* lacks, and a race feels like a race, unlike in *Tokyo Xtreme Racer*. This is, in fact, the most exciting thing to happen to racing games in ages. **16**

—James Mielke

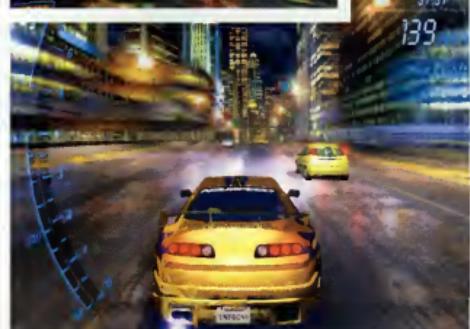
FROM ELECTRONIC ARTS
RELEASE DATE: NOVEMBER 18, 2003
PRICE: \$49.99
PLAYERS: 1-4 (Multi-Platform)
GENRE: CAR RACING
CARTERS: CANADA

GMR 9/10
GREASED LIGHTNING

BETTER THAN: *MIDNIGHT CLUB II*
ON PAR WITH: *NEED FOR SPEED: HOT PURSUIT 2*
WAIT FOR IT: *R-RACING EVOLUTION*



← The races are so fast, the stages so beautiful, and the cars so fresh and so clean that you'd think this would make for the best replays in the universe. Tragically, *Need for Speed: Underground* lacks any sort of replay mode in which to relive your most triumphant split-second victories. It's a major blemish on an otherwise excellent game. Make sure to take your wheels online.





This is where
I jumped him from behind.

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GRAND THEFT AUTO DOUBLE PACK JUST AS GRAND, TWICE AS NICE

MATURE | PS2 | XB

→ Sorry, Sony. You must have missed some fine print on that "exclusive" contract with Rockstar—the one that kept the *Grand Theft Auto* series on your console and your console only (and on PC, but that doesn't count). The bestselling *GTA3* and *GTA: Vice City* are coming to Xbox. But don't worry—PS2 owners are getting the same deal as Xbox owners.

Grand Theft Auto Double Pack for PS2 and Xbox stuffs both *GTA3* and *Vice City* into one package for the price of one game. For PS2 owners who've never played either game, it's a great time for you to discover the series. Both of you. Xbox gamers finally have

the chance to play one of the greatest videogames of all time, but with the power of Xbox's crisp graphics and the ability to rip your own music (hey, wait, the PC version could do that stuff, too...). Both games look and sound great on Xbox, just as they should.

Either way, the gameplay stays essentially the same, which is great. *GTA*'s go-anywhere, do-anything gameplay design is something that truly shouldn't be missed by any gamer. The *GTA Double Pack* is a must-have for any console gamer. Unless you only have a GameCube, in which case you're S.O.L. **→**

—Tom Price



FILE | RATED: T | GEN: ROCKSTAR BIRTH | RELEASE: NOVEMBER 2002 | PRICE: \$49.99 | PLAYERS: 1 | DUR: 10 HRS | GMR 10/10

BETTER THAN: EVERYTHING NOT AS GOOD AS... PLEASE WAIT FOR IT: *GTA4*

HARRY POTTER & THE SORCERER'S STONE SCHOOL WAS NEVER LIKE THIS

EVERYONE | PS2 (REVIEWED) | PG | XB

→ Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone isn't a remake of the PS1 game of the same name, but rather a conceptually similar reimaging.

If you've played last year's Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets, you'll have a good idea of what to expect here. Sorcerer's Stone reuses the game engine and many of the visuals from Chamber of Secrets, making for a similar experience. As Harry, you'll run around Hogwarts, fulfilling a number of objective-based quests, fighting assorted critters, and collecting magic spells and other goodies. Solid camerawork, a decent targeting system, and a simple spell "power-up" mechanic all work to the

game's advantage.

Though the bland character models and uneven voice acting can certainly be criticized, Sorcerer's Stone offers up enough quality gameplay to keep most Harry Potter fans happy. **→**

—Ryan Scott

FILE | EA GAMES | RATED: E10+ | PLAYERS: 1 | DUR: 10 HRS | GMR 10/10

BETTER THAN: THE HORRIBLY NOT AS GOOD AS HARRY POTTER: CHAMBER OF SECRETS ALSO TRY: HARRY POTTER AND THE CHAMBER OF SECRETS

GMR 6/10 STONEY



GRABBED BY THE GHOULIES

THE MORE THE MERRIER

EVERYONE | XB

→ Grabbed by the Ghoulies, Rare's first new game since Microsoft bought the company a year ago, tells the story of Cooper, a plucky young lad whose female acquaintance gets nabbed by otherworldly creatures near an old, spooky mansion. Cooper has to go through the house and save his girlfriend from the unruly residents, including mad scientists, grim reapers, and approximately 17,000 red imps. Cooper actually finds the lady in relatively short order, but then all sorts of terrible things start to happen to her, and—as you proceed through the game's comic-book-like cut-scenes—you soon finds that playing around near decrepit mansions really isn't the best thing for his health.

From this plot outline, you might imagine a game like Luigi's Mansion, in which you're relatively free to explore the haunted house at will. Not so. Instead, you enter a room, you're given

some sort of mission (defeat all enemies, defeat only a certain type of enemy, use this or that weapon to defeat all enemies), and, once you complete the task, a single door opens to your next destination. That's it.

In terms of complexity, it's on the same level as the action games that dominated NES and Genesis. This would be fine and all, but the game has some killer flaws: The camera (controlled by the triggers) is a pain to work with, your missions are arbitrary and frustrating near the end, and the gameplay's so drearily repetitive that you'll likely give up before it's all over. It's kind of a shame, because Ghoulies' presentation truly exhibits Rare quality—the graphics look great in motion, and the enemies are the cutest thing this side of Disney's *Not-So-Scary Halloween Party*. It's just that there's not much game here. **→**

—Kevin Gifford



FILE | MICROSOFT | RATED: E10+ | PLAYERS: 1 | DUR: 10 HRS | GMR 6/10

BETTER THAN: THE HAUNTED MANSION NOT AS GOOD AS LUIGI'S MANSION PLEASE WAIT FOR IT: KAMEO: ELEMENTS OF POWER

GMR 6/10 STONEY



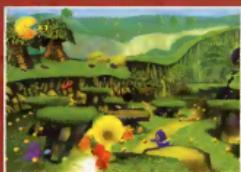
HE'D BLUSH, BUT HE'S YELLOW.



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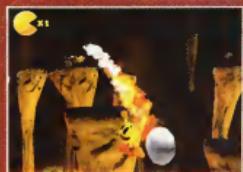
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PlayStation®2



→ Along the way, the proud Prince learns much about the fairer sex from the willowy Farah, a mysterious beauty who swaps switch-flipping duty and harmlessly flirtatious banter with equal aplomb.



→ Action elements aside, POF's most significant contribution to the 2003 videogame landscape may prove to be a reminder of its interest in adventure and exploration. Or not.

PRINCE OF PERSIA

OR, THE ARTIST FORMERLY RENDERED IN 2D

TEEN | PS2 [REVIEWED] | GC | XB

| PCI | GBA

It's clear that plenty of money, motivation, and man hours were pumped into making this *Prince* a showstopper. From the score to the cinematics, absolutely every aspect of the game reeks of polish.

The story is the stuff of Disney, but many of the games' lavish set pieces—like a mysterious grotto or the imposing Tower of Dawn—equal even the illustrious *Ice* in their majestic scope and utter believability, and the Prince's animation set is smooth.

The Prince's talent for tweaking time is equally well implemented, enabling a broader scope and challenge to many of the games' myriad majestic environmental puzzles.

He can "rewind" the action, freeze foes in their tracks, and catch lightning-fast glimpses of future challenges—although, for seasoned gamers, the latter two won't do much to enhance the overall experience.

Still, not all's perfect in *Prince*: An occasionally stubborn, sticky camera can leave the player confused as to which particular leap of faith to make next, especially when most everything's rendered in similarly earthy tones.

But POF's only really significant flaw lies in its adventure/actions ratio: Both aspects are thoroughly fleshed-out but rarely intertwined. The exploration is always compelling, but the intermittent swordplay can be a bit of a drag. We'd

rather have been able to, say, rely on combining the Prince's watch-stopping skills and off-the-wall acrobatics with the array of crumbling walls, spiked pillars, and motorized blades that dot each level to defeat enemies rather than simply hacking and slashing. Regardless, it's still an enjoyable ride, making this lavish epic a prince—but not quite king—among games. **KE**

David Chen

GMR

8/10

FAR BETTER THAN *TR: THE ANGEL OF DARKNESS*
NOT AS GOOD AS *ICO*
WAIT FOR IT: THE INEVITABLE SEQUEL

2ND. OPINION

The camera must be the hardest thing to do in three dimensions, because it's rarely done with perfection. Just like most other 3D platformers, *Prince of Persia's* viewing angles can be disagreeable, but after considering how incredibly good it is, they're ultimately forgivable. **KE**

Andrew Pfister

PUBLISHER
UBISOFT
DEVELOPER
UBISOFT MONTREAL
RELEASE DATE
AVAILABLE NOW
PLAYERS 1
RATED E
CANA

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I-NINJA

MORE FEATURES THAN A GINSU KNIFE. NOT NEARLY AS HANDY

TEEN | PS2 [REVIEWED] | 6C | X9

→ Ninja, the cute, rage-filled star of the platformer *I-Ninja*, runs across walls. He uses chains to swing across platforms. He slices his opponents into vertical halves with his sword. He rides explosive barrels. He is a renaissance ninja in a game with as many personalities as Liz Taylor has husbands.

The schizophrenia works, but just barely, because the game does nothing particularly brilliantly. When Ninja mounts huge orbs and rolls them through a series of ramps and



platforms, the effect is half *Marble Madness* and half *Super Monkey Ball*, but it holds neither the former's complexity nor the latter's charm. A souped-up boss battle fought with giant robots conjures up images of *Punch Out* without the zany likeable opposition. The boat shooting is reminiscent of that in the Macintosh and arcade title *Beach Head 2002*. Argonaut hurlis everything it can at the wall with *I-Ninja*, and certainly, some of it sticks.

As for the junk that drops to the ground, it's not palatable, but it's over

quickly, with Ninja hurtled into something completely different. ■

—Greg Orlando

PS2 ADVENTURE
6C | X9
RELEASED 11/01
PLAYERS 1
GENRE B.K.

GMR 6/10

BETTER THAN SHINOB
WORSE THAN RATCHET & CLANK 2
WAIT FOR IT NINJA GARDEN

KING OF FIGHTERS: 2000 & 2001

HAIL TO THE KING, BABY (YEAH, SUE ME)

TEEN | PS2

→ The only problem with SNK's *King of Fighters* double-pack is the two *KOF*s SNK chose to pack together. Ask a die-hard fan of the classic team-based fighting series which one they like the least, and you'll probably get one of these two, with '96 and '94 popping up as minority opinions.

It's a shame SNK hasn't brought *King of Fighters* 2002 to PS2 yet—according to general consensus, it's a massive leap forward compared with Playmore's first *King of Fighters*, and probably the best of the series since '98. Unfortunately, for reasons the same cannot parse, it's only available for the Japanese Dreamcast.

If you're willing to take what you're offered, though, this is a lot of *KOF* for a reasonable price [since the NeoGeo originals would run you about \$700]. SNK included some fun extras to go along with the games,

including galleries of intro movies and a pair of fast-paced survival modes. *2001* also offers the option to choose between the original low-resolution stage backgrounds and a set of sharper, redesigned versions—go with whichever suits your aesthetic taste.

And, despite the hotly defended opinions of 2D-fighting purists, these still are two solid games. *2000* lacks some of the frills of its predecessors, but it features hilarious alternate Striker characters and a beautifully animated final boss. *2001* suffered from a few growing pains [it was the first *King of Fighters* from a new developer after SNK collapsed], but it also added a strong selection of new characters.

So, pick this one up for a taste of the past...and hope that SNK gives us more of the really good stuff in the future. ■

—Dave Smith



PS2 SNK HEROS USA
GENRE FIGHTING
RELEASED 11/01
PLAYERS 1-4
CERO A
PRICE \$30.99

GMR 6/10

BETTER THAN FOX HOUND
NOT AS GOOD AS KOF 2002
WAIT FOR IT SVC CH. 05

KYA: DARK LINEAGE

YOU TAKE THE BAD WITH THE GOOD...

TEEN | PS2

→ It's sad when a game filled with promise fails to deliver because there wasn't enough time to polish the fundamentals. *Kya: Dark Lineage* is the latest victim—a solid platformer hidden beneath several common but fixable problems.

Controlling the camera is a minigame all its own. Don't be surprised to find the camera zipping behind walls, falling through the ground, having a seizure in the middle of a jump, or simply becoming stuck altogether. Stopping for a moment gives the camera a chance to catch up, but it's an unnecessary annoyance.

Combat is important in *Kya*, and while the moves look flashy, timing them is awkward. And learning one or two combos and using them repeatedly is enough to defeat most enemies.

Every area of the game is enormous, requiring multiple warp gates for efficient navigation. The "free fall" segments are especially cool; *Kya* is one of the few games that elicits a true feeling of awe as a character plummets through the air. Too bad the actual gameplay mechanics in this area didn't receive as much attention; too many frustrating moments are spent watching *Kya* repeatedly fail to her

doom due to overly sensitive controls. For all of *Kya*'s shortcomings, there are worse options. In the case of *Kya*, there are also plenty of better ones. ■

—Patrick Klepek

PS2 ADVENTURE
6C | X9
RELEASED 11/01
PLAYERS 1
GENRE B.K.

GMR 5/10

BETTER THAN JIMMY NEUTRON: JET FUSION
NOT AS GOOD AS APE ESCAPE 2
WAIT FOR IT SONIC HEROES



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KILL SWITCH

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PC
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PlayStation 2

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LEGACY OF KAIN: DEFIANCE

[INSERT BLUE OYSTER CULT REFERENCE HERE]

MATURE | PS2 [REVIEWED] | XB

Defiance would be a better game if it didn't have a tendency to repeat itself. As it is, its worlds and challenges have a circular quality, like the back-and-forth conversations between its self-important vampiric antiheroes. It's a well-made game, but its high points start to fall as you experience them over...and over...

About two-thirds of this game is very well made. Crystal reworked Soul Reaver into something like *Devil May Cry*, with an emphasis on action and the inclusion of a scene-focused camera, but it kept the strengths of its old games—namely, their gorgeous worlds and twisting story line. The new combat system works well on balance (the fun of telekinetically impaling opponents outweighs the odd camera problem), and the story remains as compelling as ever.

The trouble comes when *Defiance* pads its levels with repetitive encounters and identical areas. Battles become more of the same after a

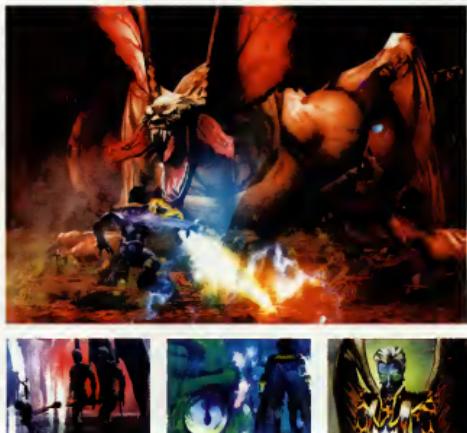
while, and you'll get lost in several stages because one end looks just like the other, with no map to point the way. If you play *Defiance* in small doses, the flaws will show up less often, so try it this way—it'll go down easier. **KE**

_Dave Smith

TEEN | RATED: 10+ | CRYSTAL DYNAMICS | TROUBLE | DATES: 11/21/03 | PLAYERS: 1 | REGION: U.S.A.

GMR 7/10

BETTER THAN: CHAOS LEGION
NOT AS GOOD AS: ICO
WAIT FOR IT: ONIMUSHIA 3



LORD OF THE RINGS: RETURN OF THE KING

"I PUT ON MY WIZARD ROBE AND HAT..."

TEEN | PS2 [REVIEWED] | GC | XB | PC | GBA

When it comes to movie tie-ins, there's one game to rule them all. *The Return of the King* takes everything *The Two Towers* did well and improves upon it in every way.

You thought EA's last game based on a *Lord of the Rings* flick looked nice? King's downright awe-inspiring visuals surpass *Towers*—in fact, it's one of the most beautiful PS2 games there is. Throw in a THX-approved soundtrack and the mood alone completely immerses you.

Gameplay essentially remains the solid, straightforward hack-n-slash you experienced in *Towers*—only, there's more of it. Instead of following just Aragorn, Legolas, and Gimli, you also experience the unique adventure paths of Gandalf and the two hobbits. The White Wizard uses magic and swordplay, while Sam and Frodo frequently use environmental

elements as weapons to make up for subpar fighting skills. And, making up for one of *Towers* major flaws, two can now play at once—even online.

King's features cinematic camera angles that hinder you, and levels that require you to survive against 200 enemies, both of which can be frustrating. When it's all said and done, though, movie games don't get any better than this. **KE**

_Chris Baker

EEA: RATED: 10+ | REV. EA KEEPSIDE SHAMES | TBA: NORTHERN | REGION: U.S.A.

PRO: 9/10
PLAYERS: 1-2
REGION: U.S.A.

GMR 9/10

BETTER THAN: ANY OTHER MODERN HOME GAME
NOT AS GOOD AS: THE HEART OF SAWMILLE GUNSEE
WAIT FOR IT: THE ACTUAL MOVIE



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→ The variety of cars in PGR2 should please racing fans of every stripe. Even the SUVs are fun to drive, especially in the corners when drivers start getting rowdy. But it's hard to get ahead a race when you scratch your vintage Porsche.



GEOMETRY WARS



Even if you hate cars, *PGR2* is worth checking out, if only for *Geometry Wars*, a hidden minigame that taps into all of your old-school gaming skills. Part *Robotron 2014*, part *Asteroids*, it's psychedelic, vector-based flashback to the '70s that'll test your mettle, make you sweat, and possibly blow your little mind.



PROJECT GOTHAM RACING 2

THE POWER(SLIDE) OF XBOX

EVERYONE | XB

PUBLISHER:	Microsoft
DEVELOPER:	Bigtime Creations
PRICE:	November 2000
RELEASE:	\$49.99
PLAYERS:	1-2 Player
SCREENSHOTS	
OVER 200X LIVE!	
ORIGIN:	U.S.A.

When Xbox was first introduced, Microsoft knew it needed a top-notch street-racing game to help launch the system and drive sales, à la Sony's *Gran Turismo* series. So it went to Bizarre Creations, the maker of *Metropolis Street Racer* for Dreamcast, which came back with *Project Gotham Racing*, a very good but flawed racing game that showed off the power of Xbox's graphics.

Now, Xbox is well into its second generation of games and Microsoft is marshalling its forces behind Xbox Live—and *PGR2* is one of the perceived heavy hitters in that lineup. And you know what? When it comes to online play, *PGR2* knocks it out of the park. It

does everything right—it offers online competitions (for up to eight different racers), has downloadable content, and constantly uploads your records and ghost-car replays on to Xbox Live for other gamers to download.

Aside from that, the game is bigger and faster this time around. More cities, such as Stockholm, Edinburgh, and Chicago, have been added, and they've been made more realistic with higher poly counts on buildings and roadside accoutrements. Still, the lack of people in the world makes it seem like you're driving around the set of *25 Days Later*.

The cars look better than ever—just shy of photo-realistic—and the driving

physics feel about the same, so if you were good at the first game, you should be able to jump right into this. The Kudos system has been revamped with a combo system, but it really feels superficial. If the Kudos weren't included, it wouldn't detract from the game, but it might make you feel a little less good about yourself. **16**

Tom Price

Tom Price

GMR SUPERCHARGED
9/10
BETTER THAN R RACING EVOLUTION
NOT AS GOOD AS DRIVING A REAL FERRARI GTO
WAIT FOR IT, GRAN TURISMO 4

2ND. OPINION

There's very little that this game lacks. It's big. It's beautiful. and it's got a bevy of supererotic and classic cars to drive (or sit in, albeit happily). And the ample online options justify plunking down the \$50 for an Xbox Live account. But with GT4 right around the bend, how long will PGR lead the pack? **16**

David Chen

GMR SUPERCHARGED
9/10
BETTER THAN R RACING EVOLUTION
NOT AS GOOD AS DRIVING A REAL FERRARI GTO
WAIT FOR IT, GRAN TURISMO 4



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→ The soft light of the setting sun over the Pacific seeps into the gloomy corridors of Alcatraz. Rainbow Six 3's level design is spectacular—they're not only completely true-to-real-life designs and situations, but also visually stunning. One expects no less from the same tech that powers its Splinter Cell cousin, with similar lighting and curtain physics.



RAINBOW SIX 3

ASK QUESTIONS FIRST

MATURE | XB

PUBLISHER: UBISOFT
DEVELOPER: UBI SOFT
TYPE: SHOOTER
RELEASE: AVAILABLE NOW
PLAYERS: 1 TO 14 OVER XB360
RATING: MATURE

→ This isn't your typical first-person shooter. Emphasizing strategy, teamwork, proper preparation, and extreme caution instead of the usual reckless running and gunning, *Rainbow Six 3* proves what countless police captains from '80s movies have been telling us all this time: If you're not careful, you're going to get someone killed.

You are Dingo Chavez, leader of an elite Rainbow antiterrorism squad, who is called in to deal with a situation brewing in Venezuela—one that involves kidnappings, oil deals, assassination attempts, charities used as operational fronts, the influence of high-ranking politicians, and even a plot about the

use of a chemical weapon against the populace of New Orleans. You know, all the usual dirty terrorist tricks. But you've read their playbook: The Rainbows are well-informed and have a large arsenal of weapons, gear, and tactics at their disposal for dealing with these issues. The large variety of mission objectives, locations, and firepower is one of the best things about *RS3*, and it keeps your interest all the way to the conclusion.

Because this is more or less a realistic portrayal, the game can be quite challenging. Each team member is given four units of health that cannot be replenished. This means that if one of the bad guys sees you before you see

him, a couple of well-placed shots can take you or one of your guys out in an instant. Enemy A.I. can be quite sharp, accurate with their shots and well-covered by the environment. But at times, they can also be surprisingly stupid, failing to notice that the head of the guy standing next to them is now part of the wallpaper and then offering no defensive reaction. The same thing can be said about your teammates: Most of the time, they'll cover your back and save your butt, but other times, they'll casually walk into your line of fire or let themselves be shot at, as if they're expecting you to come to the rescue. When the A.I. is good, which it is for the majority of the game, it's

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GUNS. LOTS OF GUNS

→ Mike Grasso is the technical advisor to the Tom Clancy series. While currently on active duty with the LAPD, Mr. Grasso has trained agents for the CIA, SAS, and the Mossad. After being blindfolded and taken to an undisclosed location in suburban Los Angeles, GMR got the opportunity to look at lots of guns and talk about Rainbow Six 3's multiplayer experience...

MG: Everybody thinks that people are smart, [but] people are stupid. [Laughs] The A.I. is really good. If you remember the first game, if you shoot somebody, you got hit from 17 different directions—they just opened up. When I came in and we started working on a human element to the A.I., I sat down and talked about psychology and said, "You know what, you've got a bad guy. That bad guy is made up of about 10 different types of bad guys. It's going to be a very, very small slice [of bad guys who] are just going to come at you and shoot and are willing to give their life...you've got to change that." That's going to happen only one out of 10 times. Most of the time, they're going to turn and run. Sometimes, they're going to shoot first, then turn to run. So, we kind of humanize the A.I., and because of that, it makes the game a lot more fun. Now with multiplayer, personalities come out. You may be a camper, and he may be a charger. That's fine. There're ways to handle you, and there're ways to handle him. Plus, people react differently under pressure. I might get him locked up in a corner and fire a round, and he'll finally get frustrated and just come out shooting, and, of course, I'm behind cover. There's ownership to it. When you have human opponents, you can deviate and play around and do different things—it's more dynamic. The great thing is, you can deviate the play. Everybody can go in with one magazine or only pistols, and everyone has to dump all their rounds except for 10. You'll have the same weapon [and] 10 rounds, so you might want to hang back and let the people shoot each other and then go in. You take the game and make it into something for having fun with your friends.



→ forces you to assume a leading role and do everything you can to take the terrorists. Even when the A.I.'s lazy, there's still a challenge.

But the biggest problem with a game like this is that no matter how many times you run through the level, the situation is always the same. There's always going to be three guys in the room, one of them breaking for the door, the one on the left hurling a frag grenade...so unless you're on your first run-through, the tension generated by the unknown is replaced by standard trial-and-error problem solving.

All of this doesn't necessarily make a bad game, but the single-player game is just not as dynamic as we

would have liked. In comes multiplayer, the feature that elevates Rainbow Six 3 from "solid" to "pretty damn solid." Deathmatch is always a good time, but the real fun is found in cooperative play, in which you work through the game's single-player missions with three human teammates via system link or Xbox Live. Voice chat transforms a simple "open, flash, and clear" command into "Jimmy's going to throw the flashbang, I'll cover the left side and above, and you take out the two guys on the right." It's definitely a more engrossing experience.

Rainbow Six 3 is a shooter with simple and intuitive controls, outstanding level design, excellent

visuals and sound, rewarding cooperative play, and an interesting [and topical!] narrative.

What really sets it apart from other first-person shooters, though, is the attention to technical and tactical detail, as well as the skill it demands from the player. Rainbow Six 3 is the thinking man's shooter. →

Andrew Pfister

2ND OPINION

Occasionally frustrating but always engaging, R63 is an excellent first foray into the wide world of tactical shooters. Better yet, the controls are so finely tuned to the Xbox controller that—as with Halo—you have only yourself to blame when your buddies bite the bullet. →
—David Chen

GMR INCAPACITATING! 8/10

BETTER THAN: SWAT-GLOBAL STRIKE TEAM
NOT AS GOOD AS: SOCOM II
NOT FOR: HALO 2

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Violence
Suggestive Themes

PlayStation 2

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BRICKLAYERS

BOUNCE THE BALL. THEN PUT IT IN THE NET. FOOL

It's the best of the rest of this year's basketballers, which means that if you're not already playing *ESPN NBA Basketball* or *NBA Live 2004* then, um, you might want to try one of these games. Other basketball games need love, too. Who gives 'em that love is up to you.

NBA SHOOTOUT 2004

SHOOT THE LIGHTS OUT

EVERYONE | PS2

→ Like its football counterpart, *ShootOut* simply doesn't compete against the might of *NBA Live* or *ESPN Basketball*. The game isn't really all that bad, though—in fact, it has most of the features found in the competition, a robust online mode, as well as the most unique equivalent to a franchise mode out of any other basketball game. But *ShootOut* does still have some fundamental problems.

For instance, the defense is better than in last year's game, but there are still some weird quirks, like the ability to get through defenses with relative ease by just walking to the hoop. Shooting also suffers from the odd case of mistaken identity, since you can hit three-point shots more often than a 5-foot jumper. These are pretty major problems, although they don't make

the game completely irritating to play.

Similar to its predecessor, *ShootOut* 2004's main draw is its modes, particularly the career mode, in which you take on the role of a single player making his way up the basketball ladder. But they aren't enough to make it worth a purchase—especially if you use *Live* or *ESPN* sitting on the store shelf next to it. ■•

Giancarlo Varanini

PS2, PS3	PRICE: \$29.99
DEV: 2K SPORTS	PLAYERS: 1-8
REL: AVAILABLE NOW	DRIVEN: U.S.A.

GMR

SHOT 6/10

BETTER THAN: THE PS1 VERSION
NOT AS GOOD AS: NBA LIVE OR ESPN BASKETBALL
TRY AGAIN: NEXT YEAR



NBA INSIDE DRIVE 2004

GET INSIDE SOME OF THIS

EVERYONE | XB

→ There have been plenty of fun 3-on-3 basketball games, but most 5-on-5 games fail to capture the same basketball feel. Needless to say, we didn't have the highest of expectations when we fired up *NBA Inside Drive 2004*. Much to our surprise, though, we really enjoyed it.

Of course, the game sports a ton of features: multiplayer capabilities via Xbox Live and system link, compatibility with Microsoft's XSNSports.com website, a general manager mode that lets gamers participate in up to 25 seasons, and commentary by Kenny "The Jet" Smith, Kevin Calabro, and Marques Johnson.

However, all these so-called bullet points mean nothing if the basic game [you versus the A.I.] sucks. But Microsoft has dramatically improved

upon older versions of *Inside Drive*—the game simply feels easier to play than earlier iterations, and it's also quite simply a lot more fun.

Playing a short season as the Lakers revealed that, unlike in many 5-on-5 games, the A.I. doesn't simply clog the middle. That said, we found the play calling difficult to figure out, and most of the points came from broken-down defensive assignments and fast breaks as opposed to well-executed plays.

Nevertheless, *Inside Drive* is one of the better 5-on-5 basketball games we've played. Add to that the fact that you can play online, too, and it seems that Microsoft might be on its way to creating a formidable basketball franchise. ■•

Will O'Neal



PS2, XBOX	PRICE: \$49.99
DEV: 2K VOLVO SOFTWARE	PLAYERS: 1-4
REL: AVAILABLE NOW	DRIVEN: U.S.A.

GMR

DRIVEN 7/10

BETTER THAN: ESPN COLLEGE HOOPS
WORSE THAN: NBA STREET VOL. 2
WAIT FOR IT: NBA LIVE 2004



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NCAA FINAL FOUR 2004

OH NO! IT'S THE FINAL FO'!

EVERYONE | PS2

Within the first few minutes of playing *NCAA Final Four*, it's plainly obvious what's wrong—the controls just don't cut it. A basketball game needs quick and responsive controls, since the actual sport requires precision passing in order to break down zone defenses...or any kind of defense for that matter.

But *Final Four*'s controls are quite sluggish, taking a split second or so before the corresponding action occurs onscreen. For shooting, this problem is caused by the game's animation-blending system, which attempts to smoothly mesh animation together, but results in the player not shooting the ball when he's supposed to. Likewise, passing just isn't fast enough, so it's quite difficult to pass the ball quickly around the perimeter to bust holes in the defense. What's worse is the imprecise passing. Players get a little confused passing the ball to specific players, particularly when trying to pass the ball into the post. But if you take the time to use

the icon-passing system, the inaccurate passing becomes less annoying.

The fundamental gameplay flaws don't stop there. It's far too easy to use a few juking moves up the middle of the paint and dunk on all but the hardest difficulty setting, but even when you crank that up, a good point guard can always find his way through the toughest zone defense. In that sense, *Final Four* almost plays more like an NBA Jam-style game.

Like almost all of the other 989 Sports games, the different gameplay modes are the highlight. The dynasty mode lets you choose from one of three coaching positions, while the career mode forces you to coach for smaller schools before making your way up to the more popular teams. There are the standard 989 online-play options as well, but none of these things should make you run out and pick up *NCAA Final Four*. **ME**

—Giancarlo Varanini



PUB: BOSS	PRICE: \$29.99
KEY: T99 SPORTS	PLAYERS: 1-8 (1-4 ONLINE)
REL: AVAILABLE NOW	GENRE: U.S.A.

GMR **5/10**

BETTER THAN: *NCAA Final Four*
NOT AS GOOD AS: *NCAA March Madness 2004*
WAIT FOR IT: *ANY OTHER COLLEGE B-BALL GAME*

NCAA MARCH MADNESS 2004

SITTING ON THE PERIMETER

EVERYONE | PS2 | XB

We expected *March Madness* to be essentially a collegiate port of *NBA Live*, and while the two games share the same engine and the physics feel the same, they look different. What also differentiates it from *NBA* games is the inclusion of all the touches that make the college game appealing. Dick Vitale provides the play-by-play, and there's a new Ask the Coach feature that highlights 13 real college coaches who will help you with things like scouting reports and specific strategies. Naturally, every Division I team is featured.

Compared to *ESPN College Hoops*,

March Madness is damn near perfect. While it suffers at times from a clogged middle, it's possible to spread things out and actually run plays. Furthermore, during gameplay, centers head to the paint and perimeter guys...well...roam the perimeter.

Graphically, *March Madness* is head and shoulders above the competition. Player models and stadiums look awesome, and the animations are fluid. Our only real visual criticisms are with the camera-angle choices. The default, Baseline Low, is so low that it's difficult to see what's going on in the paint, and Baseline High is a

little too high.

Since colleges are all about dynasties, *March Madness* has a really deep dynasty mode that gives players up to 30 years to work with a team. Ultimately, though, it comes down to how much fun the game is when your buddy from Michigan State comes by to challenge your California Golden Bears—and this is where the game shines. Plus, with online play available on the PS2 version, you can challenge your buddies wherever they happen to be. If you're gonna buy one college game this year, buy *March Madness*. **ME**

—Will O'Neal



NHL RIVALS

CHECK, PLEASE

EVERYONE | XB

► The problem with competing in the game of sports games is that since the rules of a sport rarely change, everyone is forced to do the same thing. With EA Sports firmly entrenched and Sega providing a healthy alternative, there's little room for anyone else—even Microsoft.

It's unfortunate, as *NHL Rivals* is a decent hockey game with some good ideas and appealing online features, but its minor flaws accumulate, keeping it from being a serious option for the discerning hockey fan. Among the problems, your A.I. teammates have trouble staying onsite, even in the most straightforward situations; your A.I. opponents seem to have a natural resistance to repeated body checks; most attempts to clear the puck will anger an opponent who just so happens to be skating in the exact line of fire; slap shots and goals via screens are rare; penalties are called inconsistently (blatant clotheslines are sometimes ignored); and probably least important, both the play-by-play and color commentary are repetitive.

Still, *Rivals* isn't a terrible game. What it does do well is capture the back-and-forth flow of hockey, especially during odd-man rush situations, neutral-zone navigation, forechecking, and power plays around the goal. The online pick-up mode is also worth checking out.

But with both EA's and Sega's games being better, and with most sports gamers brand loyal, *Rivals* seems out of place. It's like putting an NHL team in Columbus—they provide decent competition and some people like them, but they have yet to prove themselves as necessary. **ME**

—Andrew Pfister

PUB: MICROSOFT	PRICE: \$49.99
KEY: MICROSOFT GAME STUDIOS	PLAYERS: 1-4 (2-4 ONLINE)
REL: AVAILABLE NOW	GENRE: U.S.A.

PUB: GAMES FOR Windows	PRICE: \$49.99
KEY: GAMES FOR Windows	PLAYERS: 1-4 (2-4 ONLINE)
REL: AVAILABLE NOW	GENRE: U.S.A.

PUB: GAMES FOR Windows	PRICE: \$49.99
KEY: GAMES FOR Windows	PLAYERS: 1-4 (2-4 ONLINE)
REL: AVAILABLE NOW	GENRE: U.S.A.

PUB: GAMES FOR Windows	PRICE: \$49.99
KEY: GAMES FOR Windows	PLAYERS: 1-4 (2-4 ONLINE)
REL: AVAILABLE NOW	GENRE: U.S.A.

PUB: GAMES FOR Windows	PRICE: \$49.99
KEY: GAMES FOR Windows	PLAYERS: 1-4 (2-4 ONLINE)
REL: AVAILABLE NOW	GENRE: U.S.A.

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REL: AVAILABLE NOW	GENRE: U.S.A.

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PUB: GAMES FOR Windows	PRICE: \$49.99
KEY: GAMES FOR Windows	PLAYERS: 1-4 (2-4 ONLINE)
REL: AVAILABLE NOW	GENRE: U.S.A.

PUB: GAMES FOR Windows	PRICE: \$49.99

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SPONGEBOB SQUAREPANTS: BFBB FIGHTING THE GOOD. CLEAN FIGHT

EVERYONE | GC | PS2 | XB

In the history of warfare, the *Battle for Bikini Bottom* ranks up there with the War Against Tooth Decay and the Fight for Your Right to Party as conflicts that demand victory. Sharp and smart, *Bikini Bottom* neither settles for being kiddie fare nor becomes too difficult for its intended audience in the attempt to appeal to adults.

Nickelodeon cartoon hero SpongeBob and pals must liberate Bikini Bottom from Plankton's evil robots. Genuinely comic humor holds the standard platforming elements in place; at one point, Plankton offers the starfish Patrick a fetch quest, telling him if he succeeds he might well be kept alive to toil in a sweatshop making inferior-grade wallets. A solid and adjustable camera system works extremely well in outdoor areas and serves to make the jumping puzzles a challenge, not a chore. Like Bob himself, this game holds its water and is, in fact, remarkably fun. **IE**

—Greg Orlando



PUB TWO	PLAYABLE CHARACTERS	PRICE \$19.99
DEV NICK JR. STUDIO	PLAYERS 1	RELEASE DATE 9/23/03
REL. AVAILABLE NOW	GENRE U.S.A.	
GMR	8/10	
BETTER THAN: YODDO VINGE		
WORSE THAN: RAYMAN 2		
WAIT FOR IT: BLINK 2		

THE HOBBIT NASSSTY HOBBITSSSES

EVERYONE | GC [REVIEWED] | GBA | PC | PS2 | XB

The character-based 3D-platformer genre has made enormous leaps and bounds over the past couple of years, with such quality franchises as *Ratchet & Clank* and *Sly Cooper*. *The Hobbit* takes all of these accomplishments and, sadly, ignores them completely.

The Hobbit follows the zany misadventures of intrepid halfling burglar Bilbo Baggins. His fun-filled antics include tramping through colorful yet static environments; dying cheap and hurtful deaths courtesy of disappearing ropes, slippery cliffs, and unwieldy camera angles; and getting mercilessly

pummeled by a dozen foes because he lacks the benefit of a functional targeting system. If you play only one game set in Middle-earth this year, don't make it this one. **IE**

—Ryan Scott

PUB SONY ENTERTAINMENT	PRICE \$49.99
DEV NICKELBUD ENTERTAINMENT	PLAYERS 1
REL. AVAILABLE NOW	GENRE U.S.A.
GMR	3/10
BETTER THAN: THE FELLOWSHIP OF THE RING	
NOT AS GOOD AS: THE TWO TOWERS	
WAIT FOR IT: THE RETURN OF THE KING: THE DVD	



MIDWAY ARCADE TREASURES GAMING GEMS

EVERYONE | GC | PS2 | XB

Twenty arcade classics for 20 bucks, plus a fistful of DVD extras. You can play a game of *Sinistar*, then read a history of its development, or scope the gore in *Smash TV* and watch an interview about the animation of the land-mine explosion.

The emulation is solid, delivering sound and gameplay that's up to par. Analog control doesn't perfectly mimic the trackball in games such as *Marble Madness* and *Rampart*, and for some reason, *RoadBlasters* pulls the right, but it works great for schemes such as *720°* and *Smash TV*. Worth the money for arcade fans new and old. **IE**

—Dave Smith



PUB MIDWAY	PRICE \$19.99
DEV MIDWAY	PLAYERS 1-4
REL. AVAILABLE NOW	RELEASE 9/23/03 U.S.A.
GMR	8/10
BETTER THAN: INTELLIGENT DESIGN	
NOT AS GOOD AS: ACTIVISION CLASSICS	
ALSO TRY: YOUR OWN SATAN'S HOLLOW CABINET	

MAGIC THE GATHERING: BATTLEFIELDS SPEAK'N' SPELLS

TEEN | XB [REVIEWED] | PC

How do you get gamers to play what's essentially nerd poker? Remake it as a fighting game. What could've been crap on a DVD turns out to be a game that's easy to pick up and damn fun to play. The single-player quest mode introduces you to the game's concepts and lets you unlock spells to cast, but the real fun comes when you square off against your wizard in multiplayer matches—pick a wizard, select spells, and step into the arena. Success comes from summoning the right monsters at the right moment and bashing the hell out of oncoming creatures. **IE**

—Darren Gladstone



PUB 4KIDS	PRICE ER/UP
DEV SECRET LEVEL	PLAYERS 1-2
REL. AVAILABLE NOW	GENRE U.S.A.
GMR	8/10
BETTER THAN: YU-GI-OH!	
NOT AS GOOD AS: A WINNING BLACKJACK HAND	
WAIT FOR IT: YET ANOTHER CARD-GAME-TURNED-VISUAL	
VIDEOGAME	

ROAD TRIP: ARCADE EDITION TINY TONS OF FUN

EVERYONE | GC

The *Choro-Q* racing-game series has always provided a charming alternative to today's more serious, realism-focused racers, such as *Gran Turismo* and *Need for Speed*.

While it may be unfair to compare *Road Trip* (*Choro-Q* in its localized form) to those games, it would also be unfair to overlook what this \$20 game has to offer. Tons of tracks, 100 cars, 100 parts, and a dozen cool minigames deliver endless customization and multiplayer options. If you're just looking for a great game on the cheap, this is the move. **IE**

—James Mielke



PUB CONSPIRACY GAMES	PRICE \$19.99
DEV TAKARA	PLAYERS 1-4
REL. AVAILABLE NOW	RELEASE 9/23/03 JAPAN
GMR	8/10
BETTER THAN: MOST KART RACERS	
KIND OF: BEETLE ADVENTURE RACING	
ALSO TRY: MARIO KART DOUBLE DASH	

TRUE CRIME: STREETS OF LA.

TOMMY KNOWS KUNG FU

MATURE | GC | PS2 | XB

True Crime's central driving/carjacking portion is fantastic, and considering Luxoflux's history as a developer of car-combat games (the fantastic *Vigilante 8* series), it should be. While the re-creation of Los Angeles is spotty—*The Getaway's* virtual London remains the milestone for digitized metropolises—the air-tight control, healthy car variety, and highly destructive surroundings rock hard.

Alas, every other action sequence is hampered by a glaring flaw: The hand-to-hand combat is, despite a handful of unlockable combos, pure button-mashing chaos. There's a clever fight in which you show your opponent into a fiery stove, but that's the only strategic scrap. You can play through the entire game without blocking once, which speaks volumes.

The shooting sequences are equally mindless, since you're blessed with infinite ammo, and whoever decided to use the same button for careful/zoomed aiming and shooting should be soundly beaten.

The stealth sequences require constant

manual camera manipulation and introduce a contradiction: Why can you knock out a seasoned, hardened thug with a single judo chop, while a pedestrian bag lady absorbs a barrage of punches and kicks before slumping to the street?

Despite the aforementioned issues, *True Crime* is a very good game and very enjoyable. And the branching story line guarantees a few dozen hours of entertainment. Naturally, it's not as good (or nearly as clever) as *Vice City*—but, c'mon, what is? **16**

—Zach Meston

PC: ACTIVISION
PS2: ACTIVISION
XBOX: ACTIVISION

PRICE: \$49.99
PLAYERS: 1
ORIGIN: USA

GMR

ARRESTING
7/10

BETTER THAN: THE GETAWAY
NOT AS GOOD AS: VICE CITY
WAIT FOR IT: GTA, SIN CITY (OR WHATEVER IT'S CALLED)



MARIO PARTY 5

AIN'T NO PARTY LIKE A MARIO PARTY

EVERYONE | GC

→ *Mario Party 5* looks like some child's brightly painted dream—its worlds are rendered in vibrant colors. Developer Hudson drops pulsing pinks over oranges and mixes blue and white and green to create visually arresting playing fields for Mario and pals to tromp over.

Hudson also does an excellent job of giving life to what would normally be a static board—animated capsule machines spit out goodies, huge palm trees sprout from circular tiles, brightly colored fish swim about the undersea-themed areas. The result is an aesthetic perfectly tuned for a turn-based game. The minigames and shared experience Party offers remain the highlights of the game, but during the somewhat dull moments when a player (computer or human) is moving along the board, there's at least the pretty scenery to stare at.

Minigames, as always, tread a fine line between clever and stupid. One requires players to compete on a huge cloud while wielding air guns, with the

idea being that maybe the guns are powerful enough to push an enemy over the edge (they're not, unless the enemy is dangling on the ledge anyway), or the cloud is small enough to make the proceedings challenging (not hardly). Players can expect a batch of throwaway duels and versus games, just as they can expect a wide assortment of excellent contests requiring skill, wits, quick response, skillful or fast button presses, and dumb luck. The minigames make the Party, and they're good enough to sustain it, even if it's being played by one solitary schmo in quest mode. **16**

—Greg Orlando

PC: NINTENDO
PS2: NINTENDO
XBOX: NINTENDO

PRICE: \$49.99
PLAYERS: 1-4
ORIGIN: JAPAN

GMR

AGAIN AGAIN
8/10

BETTER THAN: SHREK SUPER PARTY
WORSE THAN: SAMBA DE AMIGO
WAIT FOR IT: MARIO KART: DOUBLE DASH



While this title might be of greater interest to console gamers (the PS2 version, published by Sony and bundled with the HOO, ships in March 2004). PC users get first crack at it. If it's any consolation, adopters of the PC version can transfer their leveled-up characters and PlayOnline info to the PS2 version next March.



Alvia uses an Airborn.
Endius uses a Mafu Goma.
Endius uses a Shello Goma.
Rathy uses a Mafu Goma.
Leafa uses an Airborn.
Tokai uses a Shello Goma.
Eita uses an Airborn.
Alvia uses an Airborn.



FINAL FANTASY XI

AN ENDLESS ADVENTURE AWAITS...

TEEN | PC

PUBLISHER: SQUARE ENIX
DEVELOPER: SQUARE ENIX
PRICE: \$49.99-\$79.99
CONTENT: MILD
INCLUDES THE RISE OF THE ZILART EXPANSION PACK
RELEASE: OCTOBER 2003
PLAYERS: 1-WHATSOEVER
ORIGIN: JAPAN

As the 11th chapter in Square's long-running *Final Fantasy* series, the massively multiplayer *Final Fantasy XI* strikes a unique chord by bringing a distinctly Japanese aesthetic to a genre dominated primarily by Western-developed games, such as *EverQuest* and *Dark Age of Camelot*.

Why Square decided to give this open-ended game the moniker *XI* as opposed to calling it something more explanatory—like *Final Fantasy Online*—is up for debate. What is certain, however, is that the development team has done its homework, resulting in an MMORPG that excels in some areas while faltering in others.

It takes place in the world of Vana'Diel, where gamers initially choose from one of three neighboring nations: Sand'oria, Windurst, or Bastok. The country you select dictates the types of inhabitants that populate the area (although characters of all races and job classes are seen in each). For example, Windurst is populated primarily by the tarus, a race of tiny creatures that specialize in magic. Other countries offer distinct attributes, but your choice will also influence what sorts of missions and quests you'll embark on.

Of course, most gamers will worry about their character creation before anything else. After setting up your

PlayOnline account (Square's online multimedia service—although not an ISP—which provides a PlayOnline e-mail account, the ability to play Tetramaster, and other social functions), players can choose from a wide variety of character races (humes, elvaans, mithra, tarutarus, and gaikai), faces, hairstyles, body sizes, and job classes (warrior, black mage, red mage, white mage, monk, etc.). North American gamers also receive the expansion pack, *Rise of the Zilart*, which adds job classes such as ninjas and dragoons.

If you're used to playing other MMORPGs, like *EverQuest* or *Asheron's Call*, you'll find things to admire in *FFXI*. Structurally, the game offers a



→ Damage access to and surviving major skirmishes in *FFXI* require major teamwork in almost all cases. Even high-level characters will get their butts whipped if they wander into hostile territory on foot. Riding over the countryside of any of *FFXI*'s three kingdoms on a chocobo keeps you out of harm's way, but only level 20 (and higher) characters can rent one. Make sure your party is balanced.



staggering array of things to do, ranging from minor moneymaking quests ("Show my hat to everyone in town!") to broader far-reaching missions that require chocobos and airships to reach and fully equipped parties to complete.

Be warned, however, because leveling up takes time, and currency is hard to come by in the early levels, which makes it crucial to team up with players with healing abilities. Since *FFXI*'s joy is found in making friends and forming reliable parties, the solo traveler should beware. This game is tough on solo players, and there's nothing more annoying than getting

clobbered by a walking turnip early in the game as you attempt to level up. Other needless drawbacks in *FFXI* are the overly fussy, menu-heavy interface (just trying to add someone to your friends list is a major pain), and the fact that, should you die just after leveling up, you can actually drop down a level. Other MMORPGs have eliminated this "feature" due to complaints, so we hope Square will address this in a patch.

Happy, the pros outweigh the cons, and if you have a rig capable of running *FFXI*, with all the bells and whistles on, at 1600x1200, you'll see it's one of the best-looking MMORPGs around.

FFXI offers great rewards to garners

willing to commit the time to it (player-vs.-player between warring nations is coming in January), and the community is filled with surprisingly helpful players, which makes for a deep, compelling, and perpetual gaming environment. It just requires a little more patience than most. **IE**

—James Mielke

2ND OPINION

FFXI makes other MMORPGs feel like a wax museum. It's just so visually alive. In comparison with what's out there, and if you've spent time in an online world, you'll know this is a big deal. It's still an MMORPG (i.e., you still punch bees in the face for hours), but it's the slickest. **IE**

Miguel Lopez

Gametion

GMR

PARTY UP!
8/10

BETTER THAN EVERQUEST
NOT AS STREAMLINED AS PHANTASY STAR ONLINE
WAIT FOR IT: EVERQUEST 2

SEGA GT ONLINE

OLD-SCHOOL DRIVING, NOW ONLINE

EVERYONE | XB

Sega GT 2002 was a perfectly acceptable, free Xbox pack-in. Now, Sega GT Online adds a few new features that fans might notice: decent new music, 40-plus new cars, and some new lighting and environmental effects, all of which are implemented subtly enough that first-timers won't be shocked or impressed by their presence.

Similarly, although Sega has added Xbox Live-compatible competitive and collaborative online racing modes, only series fans will find them exciting. Voice-collaborative relay races are a creative and cool addition for talkative

gamers, and trading features let players swap parts and cars with other Live users. But despite all this, at the end of each slow-paced race, we were pushing ourselves to make a so-so experience fun. Sega's earlier racers never left us feeling that way.

We'd like to credit Sega for releasing *GT Online* as a budget title, but consider the competition—Xbox devotees already have better choices, namely *Need for Speed Underground* and *Project Gotham 2*. *GT Online's* price merely makes it attractive in a low-risk, disposable way. **EE**
—Jeremy Horwitz



TEEN PS2	SEGA	PRICE: \$19.99	PLAYERS: 4-12 (ONLINE)	GENRE: RACING
RELEASED: NOVEMBER 2003				

GMR 7/10

BETTER THAN: *SEGA GT 2002*
NOT AS GOOD AS: *Most Xbox Racers* SINCE *GT 2002*
WAIT FOR IT: *Gran Turismo 4*

MEDAL OF HONOR: RISING SUN

THE SUN ALSO SETS

TEEN | PS2 | REVIEWED | XB | EC

Medal of Honor: Rising Sun feels a bit like Michael Bay's *Pearl Harbor* in that an attempt to make an epic WWII Pacific Theater experience results in a product with brilliant touches mixed with mediocrity. *Rising Sun* does, however, get a nod for not starring Ben Affleck.

What should have been a triple-A game that replaces evil Nazis with inscrutable Japanese turns out to be merely a decent shooter with fantastic production values. As awe-inspiring and grandiose as the Pearl Harbor level is, it's still just a rail shooter. The missions are uneven, ranging from

uninspired "stealth" levels to well-designed artillery raids. While the enemy AI seems sly at first, popping out of secret holes and all, you eventually find out that the Imperial Army ain't the brightest bunch and tends to remain oblivious to slain comrades. And the multiplayer is pretty bland, with the added oddity of grenade use that's tougher than it is in single-player mode. Although the overall package is disappointingly unsatisfactory, there's enough great moments to make it worth a look: it's just not a *MOH*-class shooter. **EE**
—Thierry Nguyen



TEEN XBOX	THQ	PRICE: \$49.99	PLAYERS: 2-4	GENRE: SHOOTER
RELEASED: NOVEMBER 2003				

GMR 7/10

BETTER THAN: *PEARL HARBOR*
NOT AS GOOD AS: *MEDAL OF HONOR: ALLIED ASSAULT*
WAIT FOR IT: *Call of Duty*



SPACE CHANNEL 5

THE SUN ALWAYS SHINES ON T.U.

TEEN | PS2

► The character-based rhythm-action genre is, at this point, a little like a cute, big-eyed kitten that'll be put to sleep if no one claims it. *Space Channel 5 Special Edition* is looking at you, mewling "Love me! Love me!" and doing cute tricks, like costing only \$30 for two games. How could you pass up something like that?

Well, you could pass them up because they're essentially Dreamcast games released on PS2 in 2003. So, if cutting-edge graphics are important to you, that might be a bit of a problem, especially the first game's polygons overlaid on FMV—although the sequel's strictly real-time visuals flow much better and the dancing is much smoother. You could pass them up because the first game is about 40 minutes long and the second one somewhere around 70 minutes. Or you could get them and play them again and again the way you play a favorite album, because your \$30 will get you two of the funkiest, most charming grooves you'll ever see in a videogame. Plus, they stomp all over *PaRappa*'s

pathetic PS2 outing. If you're hesitant because you weren't sure about part one on Dreamcast, that part two's music is tighter, animation looser, and gameplay tweaked enough with lyrical and instrumental interludes to make it feel like part one should have been.

Apollo Smile even reprises her surprisingly capable role as reporter Ulla for part two, and she nails the part again. Best of all, both games (which require precision timing) can now be played with PS2's more responsive D-pad.

We are normally above brazen, emotional appeals, but if you don't buy this game, the kitten gets it. **EE**
—Nich Maragos

TEEN UNITED KINGDOM ARTISTS	PRICE: \$21.99	PLAYERS: 1-2	GENRE: DANCE
RELEASED: NOVEMBER 2003			

GMR 8/10

BETTER THAN: *PaRappa*, 2
NOT AS GOOD AS: *Gitaroo Man*
WE'LL MISS YOU: TETSUYA MIZUGUCHI



VIRTUAL ON: MARZ NO LIFE ON MARZ

TEEN | PS2

→ If Sega had willfully tried to destroy the *Virtual On* franchise, it could not have done a better job than with *Marz*. This game gets almost every design decision wrong and looks like hell on top of that—worse than *Oratorio Tantram*, which hit arcades five years ago. Die-hard *Virtual On* fans will wonder what happened, and everyone else will wonder why they ever liked this series.

Hilmaker started with one good idea, using the Dual Shock sticks to mimic the arcade games' twin-stick controls. Everything goes wrong after that. The single-player game's lifeless AI, boring levels, and preposterous story make it impossible to slog through the missions, and the multiplayer game is crippled as a result. To unlock any fun mecha for the Battle mode, you have to suffer through the solo game. Even the once-beautiful *Virtual On* music style has been replaced by bland synth sounds, adding one final insult to this sorely lacking package. ←

—Dave Smith



PRICE: \$69.99
GEN: HORROR
RELEASE: NOVEMBER 2002
PLAYERS: 1-2
RATING: T
COUNTRY: JAPAN

GMR

BETTER THAN: KRAZY IVAN
NOT AS GOOD AS: ORATORIO TANTRAM
WAIT FOR IT: ANY OTHER MECHA GAME

TINNY
4/10

SPAWN: ARMAGEDDON FROM HELL

MATURE | XB (REVIEWED) | GC | PS2

→ Proceeds from *Spawn: Armageddon* will partially go, one supposes, to Todd McFarlane, the comic-book author who created its protagonist. With said money, McFarlane can rightly afford to enlist the aid of a skilled hypnotherapist, who can make him forget about this video coprolite—or at least fund a burial plot and a nice, spacious coffin to roll over in.

The apocalyptic 3D brawler serves up action-packed comic-book moments in the Mighty McFarlane style—like when the game's eponymous antihero fights an entire battle with a gray brick wall blocking the player's view. Overly simple mechanics allow players to earn special technique points simply by jamming on a controller button to shoot *Spawn*'s magical chains at enemies in rapid-

fire succession.

Dull platforming elements require *Spawn* to leap and glide with his magical cape in order to find electrical boxes and switches that, when chopped with an ax, will open new gameplay areas, which will then be blocked off to create arenas in which *Spawn* must kill a series of enemies before he can proceed. *Armageddon*, real or video style, should not be this uninspired.

Enemies come directly from the pencil of McFarlane or from artists who have managed to capture McFarlane's notion that a monster should look either as ridiculous as possible (witness the killer bulldozer, the *Bulldozer*) or, in the case of the oversized cybernetic gorilla deliciously named Cy-Gor, as big and ridiculous as possible.

A rockin' rock riff jackhammered over and over, serves to remind all that, contrary to the sage words of AC/DC, sometimes rock 'n' roll is noise pollution. Repeat, ye slimmers, for judgment is at hand: *Spawn: Armageddon* gets a three. ←

—Greg Orlando



PRICE: \$39.99
GEN: TBO
RELEASE: NOVEMBER 2002
PLAYERS: 1
RATING: T
COUNTRY: U.S.A.

GMR

BETTER THAN: ANY OTHER SPAWN GAME EVER MADE TO DATE
WORSE THAN: LIVING THROUGH THE REAL ARMAGEDDON
WAIT FOR IT: SPIDER-MAN 2

PUZZLING
3/10

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WWE SMACKDOWN: HERE COMES THE PAIN

THE SOAP OPERA FOR MEN

TEEN | PS2

As the WWE grows ever less watchable, PS2 wrestling games have suddenly become playable. After three *SmackDown!* worth of broken gameplay, Yuke's rang the cherries with last year's *Shut Your Mouth*, and now it scores another solid hit with *Pain*. If you don't get pro wrestling, this won't change your mind, but the fading corps of WWE diehards should like it just fine.

What last year's model finally got right, this year's does, too. Season mode makes sense, with solid cinematics, readable text, and a logical flow between matches. Some of the usele...less frills are gone, and load times are more manageable now. In the ring, a two-stage grappling system allows for bigger move sets, and simplified reversals make it easier to shift a match's flow while avoiding *Just Bring It's* ridiculous, grappling ping-pong.

Yuke's has also fixed some issues that fans have had since the original *SmackDown*. Submission moves finally make sense, thanks to a logical location-based damage system, and wrestlers' weights are accurately presented. Eddie Guerrero can't slam Brock Lesnar without a lot of effort.

Visually, this engine can go only so far. New lighting adds realistic skin and clothing highlights, and transition animations are almost always excellent, but the model and texture quality shows this technology's age; new 3D crowd isn't much, either. Say what you like about *Raw* on Xbox, but its crowd signs smoke the competition.

Details like these are *SmackDown's* only problems, though. Take the money you'd spend on a McMahon-headlined pay-per-view and create your own WWE instead. **EE**

—Dave Smith



BY THE
RD. OCTOBER 2002

PRICE: \$49.99
PLAYERS: 1-4
DESIGN: JAPAN

GMR 8/10

BETTER THAN: *WWE RAW 2*
BUT NOT *WWE PRO WRESTLING 5: SIX-MAN SCRAMBLE*
ALSO TRY: *GBA PRO WRESTLING*



THE SIMS: BUSTIN' OUT LET THE CAPTIVES ROAM FREE

TEEN | GBA | GC | PS2 | XB

The Sims are back, now with 183 percent more cars, career freedom, and wacky unlockables! Other than that, it's really just more of the same—socializing, working, and caring for your little creatures' bodily functions—and it's somehow mind-numbingly mundane and brilliantly addictive at the same time.

Instead of your career following a single path through story mode, it now dramatically changes which locations and objects you unlock and which goals you complete. Mad scientists unlock laboratories and Tesla coils, jocks get gyms and high dives, and so on. And if you get bored with one

location, you can always hop into your car and roll to greener pastures. If you get sick of your job, you can start up a new one. Repeat potential abounds—you can't unlock it all unless you play all the careers.

Add in two-player co-op, online play (on PS2) for leveling up your character and trading unlockables, GBA-to-GC connectivity, and the classic open-ended free play mode, and you've got a game that'll easily devour any time you might have in "real" life. Just remember never to let your Sim pee his or her pants—it kills the social life. **EE**

—Jennifer Tsao



BY ELECTRONIC ARTS
PRICE: \$49.99
PLAYERS: 1-2
RELEASE DATE: DECEMBER 2002
RATING: E10+ U.S.A.

GMR 9/10

BETTER THAN: *PLAYING WITH DOLLS*
NOT AS GOOD AS: *HAVING REAL-LIFE SERVANTS*
WAIT FOR IT: *THE SIMS RACING*

WHIPLASH FLAMING HARES

TEEN | XB (REVIEWED) | P2

The time has come to stick it to the man, or in Whiplash's case, Mr. Mann, head of the conglomerate Genron. Escaped lab animals Spanx the weasel and Redmond the rabbit are chained at the wrists, mad as hell, and well, it's clobbering time.

Whiplash's bland environments are filled with good, senseless violence. Spanx hurls Redmond with destructive force and wantonly stuffs the bunny into machines that grind gears, turn the hair toxic, or set it afire. Simple puzzles require players to isolate and then smash a room's weak spot. Tongue-in-cheek humor and mindless, cathartic bashing of things keep the

proceedings from getting overly dull; one sequence features Redmond becoming excited at seeing a shiny red button. "Push a button, get a cookie!" he titters, keeping this from becoming an experiment in tedium. **EE**

—Greg Orlando

BY CRYSTAL DYNAMICS
PRICE: \$29.99
PLAYERS: 1
RELEASE: U.S.A.

GMR 7/10

DEVO

BETTER THAN: *HAYDEN CALLIGARIS: KING*
WORSE THAN: *BEYOND GOOD AND EVIL*
WAIT FOR IT: *HIGH FLYING HYPERGRIND*





GBA REVIEW

"WHO ARE YOU?" I AM ME PLUS YOU IS WE AND SO WE ARE TOGETHER. IT'S THE MAGICAL EQUATION OF FUN

MARIO & LUIGI BROTHERLY LOVE

EVERYONE | GBA

Nintendo is unlikely to get into the full-fledged RPG business anytime soon, which is a shame, because when it applies itself (or finds the right people), the company can create some of the most memorable moments in gaming. *Mario & Luigi* is one of those games you cherish playing—and avoid completing because you just don't want it to end.

Set in the neighboring Beanbean Kingdom, the story and situations are, by and large, typical of the genre: pursue kidnappers, search the land for important items, help out townsfolk with their small problems. What *Mario & Luigi* has on top of that is a consistently interesting and active battle system, a healthy dose of Nintendo fan service, and an unusually wicked sense of humor. Note the Hammer Bros., reminiscing with the plumbers about good times gone by, or Bowser's inability to remember Luigi's significance in the Mario universe, much less his name. As an RPG, *Mario & Luigi* is outstanding. As a Nintendo game, it's a laugh-out-loud riot. **14**

—Andrew Pfister



PUB: NINTENDO
DEV: ALANA DESIGN
RELEASE: 1
PLAYERS: 1
REGION: JAPAN
COST: \$39.99
RATING: COMEDY GOLD
GMR: 9/10



BETTER THAN: GOLDEN SUN: THE LOST AGES
EASIER THAN: FINAL FANTASY TACTICS ADVANCE
ON PAR WITH: PAPER MARIO (NAH)

SHINING SOUL 2

THE MORE, THE MERRIER, TRULY

EVERYONE | GBA

This is the way a sequel should be done. Although the first *Shining Soul* is a pleasant-enough way to spend some hours dungeon crawling and item grabbing, *SS2* is literally twice as much game.

Among *SS2*'s enhancements are double the character classes, environments, and rare items to find, as well as an actual RPG-style town to explore before you begin your dungeon crawl. Vastly improved graphics and animations make this practically a new game. Although playing the game solo is more enjoyable this time around, only those who exploit *SS2*'s multiplayer action will reap the game's true benefits. With tons of new rare items to be found, *SS2*'s *Diablo*-esque collection addiction reaches new heights, which leads to the game's primary drawback. In the first game, you find the best items, leaving you with more money than you can spend. In *SS2*, merely identifying items and purchasing decent equipment suffers from a high cost, making *SS2*'s fiercest battles often ones of economy. **14**

—James Mielke

PUB: ATLAS
DEV: SEGA
RELEASE: 2/10
PLAYERS: 1-4 (W/Link cable)
REGION: JAPAN
COST: \$39.99
RATING: POLYSHINE
GMR: 7/10



BETTER THAN: PINBALL OF THE DEAD
NOT AS GOOD AS: SONIC PINBALL PARTY
BEST FEATURE: DOESN'T REQUIRE QUARTERS

JAMES BOND: EVERYTHING OR NOTHING

EVERYTHING COUNTS IN SMALL AMOUNTS

TEEN | GBA

Teeny-tiny James Bond, womanizing spy and centerpiece of *Everything or Nothing*, does not want for a huge adventure. When goons need dispatching, he creeps up behind them and takes them out in silent-but-deadly fashion. When the metal-toothed assassin Jaws' social etiquette falls short of the British standard, old Bond stands ready to deal a lesson in gentlemanly manners.

The game begins in epic fashion, with our protagonist rappelling from an exploding building, and manages to keep its intensity throughout. Bond must move with caution, sneaking about to avoid guards. Stealth and quiet kills are rewarded with style points that can be used to purchase new gadgets, armor, and weapons. Reckless play ensures Bond must shoot and brawl his way out of sticky situations. The mechanic works remarkably well, as players can opt for a straightforward adventure or a more strategic experience, with each avenue presenting an equal, but certainly different, challenge.

EA slips by bridging together Bond's adventures with unwieldy and dull car-combat minigames. This poor man's *Spy Hunter* is the part of *Everything or Nothing* in which nothing is, in all honesty, preferable. **14**

—Greg Orlando

PUB: EA GAMES
DEV: ELECTRONIC ARTS
RELEASE: 3/10
PLAYERS: 1-4
REGION: NORTH AMERICA
COST: \$39.99
RATING: HALFWAY
GMR: 6/10



BETTER THAN: BATMAN, RISE OF SIN TZU GBA
WORSE THAN: PRINCE OF PERSIA GBA
WAIT FOR IT: LORD OF THE RINGS, ROTK GBA



Man (otherwise by Andre Sihayen) apart from the top crap ones of planes and stuff that we did in, like, five minutes with a Sharpie

IT'S THE FIRST ANNUAL GAME GEEZER

'BAH! HUMBUG!' HOLIDAY BUYERS' GUIDE!

→ "Hey, Game Geezer, is that you?
What are you doing here?"

Shouldn't you be on the back page?"

Of course it's me, ya idjits! Now siddown and shuddup and pay attention. I got a few things to say about this here *GMR* "holiday special," and I don't have time to get interrupted by you clods. I could drop dead any second. And let me tell you something—it'd be a relief! My keister's been backed up for so many days now that I can't hardly sit. You, with the

pimples and the Linkin Park shirt, go grab me a prune juice! Maybe something'll jar loose while we're talkin' here!

Holiday feature—bah! Like you deserve it! Holiday from what? Pocket pool? No wonder this country is going to hell! You sit on your flabby, pasty behinds all year long, plugged into your videogames and CDs and DVDs—and now you need a holiday? And presents? You want a present? How about a smack on the head with my cane! Back in my

day, we didn't need all these fancy electronic gizmos and doodads anyhoo. You wanna know what my pappy gave me for Christmas every year? A rat! A dead one! And I liked it that way!

But, no, go ahead and read about all these important videogames for the holidays! Sissies! Maybe your mommies can heat up a milky bottle for you to suck on while you read! Now help an old man get up and get out of here. I've had enough of this nonsense already. Bah!





ALL SYSTEMS! GAMES EVERYONE CAN PLAY

With stellar releases appearing on all three of the major consoles, it was a very good year to be a nonpartisan gamer.

As you can obviously see from our selection of the top ten multiplatform releases of 2003, Electronic Arts had yet another strong lineup, anchored by perennial performer *Madden* and flanked by two of EA Big's best, *NBA Street Vol. 2* and *SSX 3*. Tiger Woods is again a popular guy, and the new *Need for Speed* we like very much—no to mention a little thing called *Lord of the Rings* (it's a movie series you may have heard of). Ubisoft also

put forth an excellent effort, with *Beyond Good & Evil* and *Prince of Persia* overshadowing the letdown that *XIII* proved to be.

Activision's *Tony Hawk* series showed that it still hasn't run out of great ideas, and Namco's *Soul Calibur II* was the best multiplatform fighting game we played all year, even though it was by default. Be it sports (of the extreme and traditional varieties), action, platforming, high adventure, weapon-based fighting, or driving automobiles really fast in order to beat the other guy to the designated end area, 2003 had something for everybody to enjoy.

THE LORD OF THE RINGS: THE RETURN OF THE KING



PENSON
DAMAGE \$49.99

ESRB RATING: T
PUB: EA
DEV: EA

Play through the epic events of the final Lord of the Rings film—alone or with a friend—as the trilogy's main characters. You'll need to grid your loins for this one (it's tough), but it's worth it to immerse yourself in the war for Middle-earth. EA's getting good with the movie license thing.

BEYOND GOOD & EVIL



PENSON
DAMAGE \$49.99

ESRB RATING: T
PUB: UBISSOFT
DEV: UBISSOFT

Other games have tried to be as ambitious as *Beyond Good & Evil*, but few have done it even a fraction as well as this grand adventure game from Rayman creator Michel Ancel. It has everything—action, stealth, racing, and more—all tied together with a story told so well that you'll stay engaged until the end.

MADDEN NFL 2004



This year's gridiron king returns with the excellent new Playmaker Control feature (which lets you make offensive or defensive decisions on the fly without your opponent's knowledge), expanded customization in its slimy franchise mode, improved online play (for PS2 owners, at least), and more.

PENSON
DAMAGE \$49.99
ESRB RATING: E
PUB: EA
DEV: EA TIBURON

NBA STREET Vol. 2



EA Big's 3-on-3 playground basketball series reemerges with improvements to every aspect of the original's superaddictive formula. Play classic NBA players like Wilt Chamberlain against modern-day b-ballers like Shaquille O'Neal, customize the rules as you like 'em, then hit the streets for some totally unrealistic basketball—it's better than the real thing.

PENSON
DAMAGE \$39.99
ESRB RATING: E
PUB: EA
DEV: EA VANCOUVER

NEED FOR SPEED UNDERGROUND



Enter the world of illegal street racing in the latest *Need for Speed*. Put the pedal to the metal, flip the nitro, and experience videogame adrenaline overdose like you never have before. Life in the fast lane never looked so good, but you're going to have to supply your own scantly clad girlfriends.

PENSON
DAMAGE \$49.99
ESRB RATING: E
PUB: EA
DEV: EA BLACK BOX

PRINCE OF PERSIA: THE SANDS OF TIME



In one of most visually stunning games of all time, you'll perform jaw-dropping acrobatics, use magic to rewind your way out of deadlyfalls, and slash your way through bloodthirsty demons. The camera's a bit sketchy and the pacing can be a bit off, but we found it anything but a royal pain.

PENSON
DAMAGE \$49.99
ESRB RATING: T
PUB: UBISSOFT
DEV: UBISSOFT

SOUL CALIBUR II

The sequel to the one of the best fighting games ever coded refines rather than reimagines the original's killer gameplay. Say good-bye to your loved ones—unless they're willing to play you—and say hello to platform-specific fighters, such as Heihachi Mishima (PS2), Spawn (Xbox), and Link (GC).



PENSION DAMAGE \$49.99

ESRB RATING: T
PUB: NAMCO
DEV: NAMCO

SSX 3

Set on a single supersized mountain, SSX 3 offers virtual snowboarders superspeed, gorgeous graphics, a visceral variety of snow types, and an insane trick system that's easy to learn and a blast to master. PS2 owners can even play against another opponent online.



PENSION DAMAGE \$49.99

ESRB RATING: E
PUB: EA
DEV: EA VANCOUVER

TONY HAWK'S UNDERGROUND

When not competing in missions to further your future pro skater's career (including a few exercises in driving and running around), you can create goals, tricks, parks, and boarders—end, if you've got a PS2, compete online or even map your picture onto your skater's face. Simply bitchin'.



PENSION DAMAGE \$49.99

ESRB RATING: T
PUB: ACTIVISION
DEV: NEVERSOFT

TIGER WOODS PGA GOLF 2007

Each version of this deep yet accessible golf game has its own charm. The PS2 game supports online play, the Xbox edition has the best graphics, and the GameCube version sports GBA connectivity. All three boast a bevy of fun modes and the most advanced player-creation system ever seen.



PENSION DAMAGE \$49.99

ESRB RATING: E
PUB: EA
DEV: EA

THE ELECTRIC INTERWEB? BAH!

Yes, we know there are more than eight good games this year that have online functionality. But we wanted the ones that focus on online play, so we picked the best of the best. We also threw in Star Wars Galaxies.

BATTLEFIELD 1942 DELUXE

The definitive WWII action game has all sorts of online mayhem, both pedestrian and vehicular. Where else can you shoot Nazis zipping through the air in jetpacks? No, you can't do that in Wolfenstein.

SYSTEM: PC
PUB: EA
DEV: DICE
ESRB RATING: T



PENSION DAMAGE \$49.99

ESRB RATING: T
PUB: SQUARE ENIX
DEV: SQUARE ENIX
ESRB RATING: T

COUNTER-STRIKE

Be a true patriot! Fight terror! Or be the evil terrorists who set up the bomb! Whichever way you swing, Xboxers can now play the premiere online antiterrorism game with spiffy graphics [say] and a pad [boom].

SYSTEM: XB
PUB: MICROSOFT
DEV: VALVE
ESRB RATING: M



PENSION DAMAGE \$49.99



CRIMSON SKIES

Remember Tie Spin, with Baloo and his furry buddies flying vintage aircraft against air pirates in their own vintage craft? This is the same thing, but cooler and with real players instead of talking animals.

SYSTEM: XB
PUB: MICROSOFT
DEV: MICROSOFT
ESRB RATING: T



PENSION DAMAGE \$49.99

ESRB RATING: T
PUB: MICROSOFT
DEV: MICROSOFT
ESRB RATING: T

DARK AGE OF CAMELOT

The best old-school fantasy MMORPG on PC, with all sorts of spells and—with the Trials of Atlantis expansion—underwater high jinks. A good way to tide yourself over until E22.

SYSTEM: PC
PUB: VIVENDI
DEV: MYTHIC
ESRB RATING: T



PENSION DAMAGE \$19.99

ESRB RATING: T
PUB: VIVENDI
DEV: MYTHIC
ESRB RATING: T

FINAL FANTASY XI

The only place on the whole Internet where console and PC gamers can play together and rent chocobos. Get a head start on your PS2 buddies, and if need be, mouch off the Japanese players who've been playing this since yesteryear.

SYSTEM: PC/PS2
PUB: SQUARE ENIX
DEV: SQUARE ENIX
ESRB RATING: T



PENSION DAMAGE \$49.99

SOCOM II

The reason you got a Network Adaptor just got a little more justifiable. More maps, more gunfights, more grates to hide in, and less cheating—it's a better way to get involved in some Navy SEAL shenanigans.

SYSTEM: PS2
PUB: SCEA
DEV: ZIPPER INTERACTIVE
ESRB RATING: M



PENSION DAMAGE \$49.99

STAR WARS GALAXIES

It's still hard to be a Jedi, but while you're trying, you can learn what it's like to be a Star Wars pastry chef. Or a Star Wars stripper. Whatever Star Wars-involved fantasy you've concocted, you can probably enact it here.

SYSTEM: PC
PUB: LUCASFILM
DEV: VIZART
ESRB RATING: T



PENSION DAMAGE \$49.99

WOLFENSTEIN: TOW

Online multiplayer is the only reason to play this game (the single player is merely OK). When you tire of fighting terror in Counter-Strike, you can pop in this disc for some old-school (WWII) shooting—with the requisite bad German accents.

SYSTEM: XB
PUB: ACTIVISION
DEV: NERVE SOFTWARE
ESRB RATING: M



PENSION DAMAGE \$39.99



GBA

Coming in 2004:

- Metroid: Zero Mission
- Mario Golf GBA
- Shantae Advance
- Custom Rube Ox
- Mario & Donkey Kong
- Kingdom Hearts: Chain of Memories
- Mega Man Battle Network 4
- Super Mario Advance 5
- F-Zero

BOYS TO MEN AND BACK AGAIN

From cars to candy bars, when something stands the test of time, it's dubbed a classic. With 15 years and various incarnations under its belt, Nintendo's Game Boy—with zillions and zillions of units sold worldwide—is an undeniable, certifiable classic.

And now, in its Advance iteration(s), it's also the place to go for the classics—think of it as your personal time machine to the glorious golden days of the 8- and 16-bit eras. Just have a gander to the right and you'll see reissues, updates, and remakes of some of

gaming's greatest hits. And not only are they great, they're also portable. It's not all the same old, same old, though—designers around the globe are dreaming up new and innovative ways to make your Game Boy play. Konami's *Boktai* simply wouldn't work on a homebound console, and Nintendo's much-touted connectivity between GBA and GameCube is finally paying off, with *Legend of Zelda: Four Swords*, *Final Fantasy: Crystal Chronicles*, and *Pac-Man Vs.* leading the charge. It doesn't get any more classic than that.

PLAYING WITH PORTABLE POCKET POWER

Aural and visual enhancements for your body and your mind:

E-READER



Nintendo's e-Reader (\$39.99) enables gamers to upload levels, codes, modes, and even classic NES games to GBA by swiping coded paper cards. Is this funky add-on a gamer's e-gasm or is it just a gimmick? Um...yes.

FLOOD LIGHT



Before there was backlight, there was GBA, which, frankly, was pretty much impossible to play without direct lighting overhead. Plenty of illuminating add-ons are available; we suggest Radical's Floodlight (\$59.99).

HEADPHONE ADAPTER



Our biggest complaint about GBA SP? No headphone jack. The official adapter is available through Nintendo's website, but this adapter/earphone combo from Hip Interactive (\$59.99) is widely available.

SONGPRO



For the gamer with everything, may we recommend the SongPro Player (\$59.99), which enables Game Boys and Girls to upload MP3s, WMA, lyrics, artwork, and more to their GBAs. More info at SongPro.com.

SUPER MARIO BROS. ADVANCE 4: SUPER MARIO BROS. 3

It's a well-known fact that *SM3D* is one of the best-loved, best-selling games of all time. Now, it's been lovingly re-created for GBA, and a new gaggle of gamers-on-the-go has the chance to savor the fruits of game guru Shigeru Miyamoto's masterful labors. A perfect port of a perfect game.



PENSIÓN
DAMAJANTE
\$29.99

ESRB RATING: E

PUB: NINTENDO

DEV: NINTENDO

CASTLEVANIA: ARIA OF SORROW

Since its debut on NES way back when, the *Castlevania* series' seamless blend of whip slinging, cross tossing, and exploration has captivated gamers on nearly every console. And unlike many other venerable series, it's held up remarkably well throughout the years—it's been finely honed and makes for a perfect fit on Nintendo's portable wonder. Any of the three *Castlevania* games currently available for GBA—including *Harmony of Dissonance* and *Circle of the Moon*—make fine additions to any gamer's collection. But the ability to absorb and utilize your enemies' souls (think *Pokémon* with fangs) makes *Aria* a collector's dream and an especially engaging epic.



PENSIÓN
DAMAJANTE
\$29.99

ESRB RATING: T

PUB: KONAMI

DEV: KOET

HOLIDAY BUYERS' GUIDE!

FIRE EMBLEM

There's certainly no shortage of strategy RPGs available for GBA—Nintendo's handheld wonder lends itself nicely to anime aesthetics and turn-based combat. *Fire Emblem's* standard good vs. evil story line doesn't deviate too much from the tried-and-true RPG formula, but the strategic gameplay and sharp graphics are solid.



PENSON
DAMAGE \$29.99

ESRB RATING: E
PUB: NINTENDO
DEV: INTELLIGENT SYSTEMS

FINAL FANTASY TACTICS ADVANCE

If *Fire Emblem* sounds like kid's play, then it's time for a change of tactics. Offering down the best strategic bang for your buck, *Tactics Advance* is an armchair tactician's paradise—it's packed with deep, variable combat, an exhaustive job class system, and replay value.



PENSON
DAMAGE \$34.99

ESRB RATING: E
PUB: NINTENDO
DEV: SQUARE ENIX

MARIO & LUIGI

The unflappable mustachioed duo share the limeight in this all-new, all-star action RPG. Developers Alpha Dream has crafted something wonderful with this ode to Nintendo games past. Packed with self-referential fan service and humor, Mario & Luigi finds the brothers in search of the witch who stole Princess Peach's voice.



PENSON
DAMAGE \$29.99

ESRB RATING: E
PUB: NINTENDO
DEV: ALPHA DREAM

ADVANCE WARS 2

If it were this time last year, we'd be telling you to get the first *Advance Wars*, a fast-paced tile-and-turn-based war sim. But we're in the present, so kindly let us instead recommend this superb sequel, which adds more maps, units, and features to the already addictive and immensely popular pocket-sized package.



PENSON
DAMAGE \$29.99

ESRB RATING: E
PUB: NINTENDO
DEV: INTELLIGENT SYSTEMS

BOKTAI: THE SUN IS IN YOUR HAND

If you've been hiding under a rock, then we'll forgive you for not having heard of *Boktai*—it is solar powered, after a fashion. The brainchild of Metal Gear Solid maestro Hideo Kojima, this action RPG features a built-in solar sensor that makes *Boktai* every bit as unique as it is enjoyable.



PENSON
DAMAGE \$29.99

ESRB RATING: E
PUB: KONAMI
DEV: KOEI

THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: A LINK TO THE PAST

This remake of one of gaming's greats couldn't be more aptly titled—as with SMB4, Link takes the player back to gaming's good old days, maybe for the first time. But it's Four Swords—a linkable, four-player cooperative and competitive game—that ices the cake. Buy it now.



PENSON
DAMAGE \$29.99

ESRB RATING: E
PUB: NINTENDO
DEV: NINTENDO

WARIOWARE, INC.

To hawk Wario's wares as just a collection of minigames would not only damage your credibility, but our feelings as well. This treasure trove of nerve-jangling, one-button reflex tests is by turns schizophrenic, silly, and sneaky, pitting your hardened gaming skills against a curious cast that includes a canine cop, a brainy alien, and Wario himself. Their micro-games might find you sawing through a nice, bloody steak, shaking paws with an over-emotional border collie, snapping photos of flying squirrels, or even revisiting Samus Aran's very first battle with Mother Brain.



PENSON
DAMAGE \$29.99

ESRB RATING: E
PUB: NINTENDO
DEV: NINTENDO

N-GAGE



With a \$300 price point (phone service not included), clunky ergonomics, a small screen, short battery life, and, most importantly, a remarkably unimpressive slate of launch titles, it's quite simply the least handy handheld in recent memory.

TAPOWAVE



By the time you read this, Tapwave's *Zodiac* should be available in stores nationwide. And while we've sampled only a few launch titles so far, things look promising. It may not make phone calls, but it does feature a big, beautiful screen, an ATI graphics chip, an analog stick, and fully featured PDA functionality.





Coming in 2004:

- Metroid Prime 2
- Final Fantasy: Crystal Chronicles
- Metal Gear Solid: The Twin Snakes
- The Legend of Zelda: Four Swords
- Mario Tennis
- Gekit
- Resident Evil 4
- Pilgrim 2
- Harvest Moon: A Wonderful Life
- Star Fox 2
- Phantasy Star Online: Episode III Card Battle
- Killer 7
- Custom Robo

GAMECUBE NO MORE EXCUSES, DANG IT!

It's now or never for GameCube. With Nintendo's new marketing message, an aggressive new price point of \$99, and all of its major franchises and historical best-sellers (Mario, Zelda, Metroid, Mario Kart, F-Zero) available, the list of reasons not to get a Cube keeps shrinking.

This was another solid year for the system, despite the delays of Metal Gear Solid: The Twin Snakes and Final Fantasy: Crystal Chronicles, two high-profile third-party games that will only

strengthen its 2004 lineup. As we were coming down from our Metroid Prime high, The Legend of Zelda: The Wind Waker kept our gaming closets springtime fresh. Summer was slow, as usual, until Mario Golf and F-Zero GX kicked off a fall campaign that included the likes of Viewtiful Joe, Billy Hatcher and the Giant Egg, Soul Calibur II, and Rogue Squadron III: Rebel Strike. And just in time for the holiday rush, Nintendo's Mario Party 5, 1080° Avalanche, and Mario Kart: Double Dash arrived. Good times had by all.

TRICKING OUT YOUR CUBE

Four essential accessories that let your Gamecube be all that it can be:

THE WAVEBIRD



It's the best wireless controller ever made, and now it comes in a sleek platinum color. A pair of AA batteries provides enough juice for many all-night gaming marathons.

BROADBAND ADAPTER



You can reliably find them only at Nintendo's online store, located at www.nintendo.com. You'll need (at least) one if you want to link up Mario Kart, 1080°, or yes, even Kirby Air Ride.

GAME BOY PLAYER



Castlevania: Circle of the Moon never looked so...visible. That's the magic of the Game Boy Player: big screen, big sound, big fun. And at \$50, it's a big bargain. Too bad they're only in black.

GBA LINK CABLE



How exactly do you plan on participating in the connectivity revolution when you don't have this essential conduit between the two machines? How? All you need is \$10 to join the future!

MARIO KART: DOUBLE DASH

As you hopefully just read in the Reviews section, we think Mario Kart: Double Dash is really, really, really good. The kind of good that starts on Christmas morning and doesn't stop until sometime around Labor Day. But that's just a resting period, because it picks back up again the next week. You get what we're trying to say—the fun never ends. Double Dash's cooperative driving and 16-player support (better grab those broadband adapters now, kids!) mean even more mayhem, and it can't be that hard to find 15 other people who want to play. They don't even have to be friends, just invite some random strangers into your home. Mom and Dad will be proud of your generous actions and reward you.



PENSON
DAMAGE \$49.99

ESRB RATING: E
PUB: NINTENDO
DEV: NINTENDO

VIEWTIFUL JOE

We're going to try to write this without using a pun on the title. Here we go: Capcom's Viewtiful Joe is a refreshingly retro side-scrolling beat-em-up with an insanely hard but incredibly rewarding difficulty level. It also sports a gritty, cinematic comic-book style that, in motion, is quite simply viewtiful...ah, damn. Almost made it.



PENSON
DAMAGE \$39.99

ESRB RATING: T
PUB: CAPCOM
DEV: TEAM VIEWTIFUL

HOLIDAY BUYERS' GUIDE!

SKIES OF ARCADIA: LEGENDS

Originally released on Dreamcast, the excellent RPG Skies of Arcadia got reworked into a GameCube game. It sports a new subtitle and a somewhat sharper look, but more important additions include the new characters and story elements. A second chance was given, yet you people still didn't take it. What's up with that?



PENSON
DAMAGE \$44.99

ESRB RATING: T
PUB: SEGA
DEV: SEGA

MARIO GOLF

It's a golf game starring Mario and friends, what more can be said? How about "it's awesome," or "it's really easy to pick up and play," or "stop with the taunts already, you moron, I'm putting for birdie," or "seriously dude, hit that Tautu button one more time and I'll share this freakin' WaveBird where it won't be platinum anymore."



PENSON
DAMAGE \$49.99

ESRB RATING: E
PUB: NINTENDO
DEV: CAMLEOT

BILLY HATCHER & THE GIANT EGG

Billy Hatcher isn't Sonic Team's greatest game ever, but it's still a fun romp through a land of giant eggs and boys dressed in chicken suits. Where else are you going to find that? Not in any *Final Fantasy* game, that's for damn sure. It should also briefly satiate your desire for 3D platforming until *Sonic Heroes* arrives.



PENSON
DAMAGE \$39.99

ESRB RATING: E
PUB: SEGA
DEV: SONIC TEAM

F-ZERO GX

We've broken at least one controller because of the insanely difficult story mode missions (it still works, but there's something shaking around inside). But don't let that stop you from getting the fastest, most intense, and best-looking racer released this year. And don't sweat the difficulty: All you need is a little patience.



PENSON
DAMAGE \$49.99

ESRB RATING: T
PUB: NINTENDO
DEV: AMUSEMENT VISION



1080° AVALANCHE

Snow is back in season, which means you'll need something to satisfy your carving cravings. If presented with a choice, we'd tell you to pick up SSX3. But 1080°'s straight racing approach SSX3's out-of-control trickery. You can't lose either way, unless you hate snowboarding. So then why are you reading this?



PENSON
DAMAGE \$49.99

ESRB RATING: T
PUB: NINTENDO
DEV: NINTENDO

RUPEE UP!



Buy a GameCube this Christmas, and you'll receive a disc containing the following: *The Legend of Zelda, The Legend of Zelda II: The Adventure of Link, The Legend of Zelda: The Ocarina of Time, The Legend of Zelda: Majora's Mask*, and a playable demo of *The Legend of Zelda: The Wind Waker*. Indeed, *Nintendo's* holiday bundle is a *Zelda* fan's dream come true... which is a shame considering most *Zelda* fans have already purchased a GameCube. Oopsh! If you have a system already, you can still get the disc by buying and registering two of the following: *Mario Kart: Double Dash*, *Mario Party 5*, *Mario & Luigi*, and *1080° Avalanche*.

MARIO PARTY 5

Owning all the versions of *Mario Party* earns you a spot in the exclusive Sucker Club—congratulations, your official Mario and Luigi mismatched socks are in the mail. But you're not just a sucker, you're a sucker who likes to have fun—and piss off your friends as they seek their last star. That gets you in the Jerk Club.



PENSON
DAMAGE \$49.99

ESRB RATING: E
PUB: NINTENDO
DEV: HUSSON

THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: THE WIND WAKER

Can it be? Have we actually run out of meaningful things to say about the most controversial *Zelda* game of all time? Yes, we have. So, we'll take this opportunity to remind you of *Nintendo's* *Zelda* GameCube bundle, which includes a playable demo of *The Wind Waker* (among other things, look to your right, as well as reminisce about our favorite parts of the game. Like the part where...oh wait, that's probably a spoiler). Well, how about when Link finds out that Hyrule really...hmm...when Tetra...you know what? Just go play it. Despite its small flaws, it's a beautiful game with a great story and fun play mechanics. Like all *Legend of Zelda* games, *The Wind Waker* is worth playing many times over.



PENSON
DAMAGE \$49.99

ESRB RATING: T
PUB: NINTENDO
DEV: NINTENDO

"EH? WHATCHASAY?!"





Coming in 2004:

- Metal Gear Solid 3
- Killzone
- Gran Turismo 4
- Final Fantasy XII
- Final Fantasy XIII
- Dragon Warrior VIII
- Kingdom Hearts II
- Front Mission 4
- GTA4
- Crimsonis 3
- Nina
- Nightshade
- Nico
- Gradius V
- Nightmare Before Christmas
- Incredibles
- Drakengard
- Spy Fiction
- Def Jam Vendetta 2
- Samurai Warriors

PS2

LAST MAN STANDING?

→ Despite the occasional shot to the dome by Microsoft and Nintendo, Sony is still leading the console pack by a wide margin with its world-dominating PlayStation 2. With some of the best third-party-software support and hundreds of quality titles in its library, PS2, complete with an upgraded DVD player (quieter fan, built-in infrared sensor—that old chestnut), is the machine to beat this holiday season.

But is PS2 running out of gas?

HARDWARE FOR YOUR FACE AND BRAIN!

Playing PS2 games often requires more than a controller, and we've got the gear to prove it!

LOGITECH USB HEADSET



Practically mandatory if you're going to play SOCCOM II this holiday season (or need something for trash-talking during online Madden games), Logitech's beefier, much-improved USB headset (\$39.95) features a wide, comfy band and improved brain-hugging ergonomics. Brains!

EYE TOY



If you like to wave your hands wildly in the air, the Eye Toy (\$49.99) will help accommodate your twisted behavior. By incorporating webcam technology with spaz-recognition software, Eye Toy (and included games) encourages gaming instincts in less dexterous family members.

FINAL FANTASY X-2

Those crazy Final Fantasy X kids are at it again, minus most of the guys, but with lots of fashionable outfitz! Playing dress up and casting Thundaga spells has never been more inviting than with Yuna, Rikku, and gothic newcomer Paine. Tomorrow is only a moogle away!



PENSONG
\$49.99

ESRB RATING: T
DEV: SQUARE
PUB: SQUARE ENIX

RATCHET AND CLANK 2

What do you get when you mix a butt-lesser robotic backpack buddy with a rodent-tastic leading man and a crapload of over-the-top weapons? Ratchet and Clank, most would say. This action-packed sequel outperforms not only last year's debut, but also Sony's stately Jak II. Yep.



PENSONG
\$39.99

ESRB RATING: T
DEV: INSONGIAC
PUB: SCEA

SOCOM II

Thread a full metal jacket through a bad guy's face in this fantastic off- and online game designed to prove—once and for all—that hiding in the grass is mainly work. Smarter A.I. allies, better graphics, and more tactical field options than ever ensure months of SEALs-style fun.



PENSONG
\$49.99

ESRB RATING: M
DEV: ZIPPER INTERACTIVE
PUB: SCEA

WWE SMACKDOWN! HERE COMES THE PAIN

When more than 50 inflat-o-giants (wearing little more than Speedos and smiles) show up to lay the smack down, you know you're in for good times. That Here Comes the Pain is one of the most playable wrestling games yet makes this chicken soup for the soul. Mmm... baby hungry!



PENSONG
\$49.99

ESRB RATING: T
DEV: YUKES
PUB: THQ

CASTLEVANIA: LAMENT OF INNOCENCE

The premiere chapter of the Belmont story is told in grand style. Leon Belmont's soon-to-be-legendary whip makes the corporeal evil lurking in the 11th century castle even more dead. As Konami's first "real" foray into 3D, *Innocence* is not quite a triumph, but don't be guilty of passing it up.



PENISON
DAMAGE \$49.99

ESRB RATING: M
DEV: KONAMI
PUB: KONAMI

FATAL FRAME II: CRIMSON BUTTERFLY

Find comfort in your sister's loving arms as you try to get to the bottom of Fatal Frame II's lethal mysteries. Armed with only a mystic camera and the advice of a ghostly boy, you battle malevolent spirits in this prequel to last year's sleeper hit *Fatal Frame*. Best played in the dark.



PENISON
DAMAGE \$49.99

ESRB RATING: M
DEV: TECMO
PUB: TECMO

AMPLITUDE

Tap buttons in time with today's most popular bands, such as Blink-182, Pink, Garbage, David Bowie, and Crystal Method. Multiplayer mayhem ensues when you play or opponents online or when you create your own remixes to play cooperatively with friends. Fun for all!



PENISON
DAMAGE \$39.99

ESRB RATING: T
DEV: HARMONIX
PUB: SCEA

BUNDLE OF JOY!

Can't decide what to get? Don't know what you need? Let us offer a suggestion to help iron out those furrowed brows.



KARAOKE REVOLUTION

You know you're impervious to shame when you're willing to make like a virtual Timberlake in front of family and friends. Turn your living room into Star Search (minus Ed McMahon) as you sing along to the likes of R.E.M., Hoobastank, and Michelle Branch. La la la!



PENISON
DAMAGE \$59.99

ESRB RATING: E
DEV: HARMONIX
PUB: KONAMI

SPACE CHANNEL 5 SPECIAL EDITION

Uala is back—and live times the lady *P.N. 03's* Vanessa Schneider will ever be—in a double-disc set of groovy, psychedelic dancing action featuring an awesome soundtrack, sexy outfit, and Space Michael! Special Edition includes *SC5* and the never before released in the United States sequel, *SC2*.



PENISON
DAMAGE \$29.99

ESRB RATING: E
DEV: UNITED GAME ARTISTS
PUB: AGETEC

PS2 Network Adaptor Bundle

→ Gaming goes online in a big way, and kids love to play, or so they say. What the hey? Everything you need for your online stash that merry old way includes a PS2 system, a jolly copy of *ATV Off Road Fury 2* to start your online gaming with, and a PS2 Network Adaptor (which accepts both 56K and broadband connections, although software support may vary—all for \$199.99. Ho, ho, ho! Hey, hey, hey! That's the way we sleigh!

VIRTUA FIGHTER 4 EVOLUTION

The best 3D fighting game in the world can be yours for only 20 bones. There's something stupid-cool about that. If you haven't discovered this stellar game's depth, beauty, hard-hitting grace, and hundreds of unlockable items, there's no better time than now. P.Y.O.W!



PENISON
DAMAGE \$19.99

ESRB RATING: T
DEV: AM2
PUB: SEGA

MOTO GP 3

Third time's the charm for Namco's popular speed-bike racer. With 15 real-world GP courses, a slew of manufacturers' top moto models, an eye-watering sense of speed, and some of the slickest graphics seen in a racing game, Moto GP 3 is perfect for tapping your inner turbo.



PENISON
DAMAGE \$49.99

ESRB RATING: E
DEV: NAMCO
PUB: NAMCO





Coming in 2004:

- Halo 2
- Psychonauts
- Fable
- Republic Commando
- Dead or Alive: Online
- Jade Empire
- B.C.
- Phantom Dust
- Bresliews
- Conker: Live and Uncut
- True Fantasy Live Online
- Otop 2
- Railstrip Challenge 2
- Full Spectrum Warrior
- Suduki
- Kameo

XBOX

MICROSOFT HANGS MEGA-TOUGH!

→ Microsoft, like Sisyphus, had its boulder. Oversized and facing off against the monster known as PS2, no one doubted the Xbox faced a near-vertical climb. The system almost arrived stillborn in Japan, and critics in the West were quick to point out that beyond *Halo*, the system's library was as deep as a dime and as exciting as mown grass.

Now, however, the boulder is poised for its downhill run. Fueled by such quality titles as *Star Wars: KOTOR*, *Soul Calibur II*, and *Crimson*

Skies: High Road to Revenge, and boosted by Xbox Live, the online service that's finally coming into its own, Xbox may have cleared its mountain of troubles in 2003. Whether the console proves to be a runaway behemoth or a juggernaut crushing all in its wake remains to be seen, but the future seems bright. Forthcoming titles such as *The Movies*, *Fable*, and *Republic Commando* are dizzying game fans with their fumes, making 2004 seem like the party-filled 1999 all over again.

YO, TECH THIS OUT!

Adding even more high-tech nonsense and whatnots:

WIRELESS-G ADAPTER



Throw off the shackles of restrictive wires and be joyous! The Wireless-G Adapter (\$139) lets you add an Xbox to your high-speed network, meaning you can log on to Xbox Live without the hassle of wires. With this wondrous device, you can also play your Xbox on any television in the house. Miracles and wonder indeed.

XBOX DVD KIT



This kit enables you to play DVDs on your Xbox, and although it stinks that you have to pay \$30 for it, the device works very well. It comes with an infrared receiver that plugs into one of your controller ports and a swanky green-and-black remote control with all the normal trappings, such as play, fast-forward, and rewind.

HALO

The Queen Mum of all Xbox games follows the mysterious Master Chief as he attempts various social interactions with the alien Covenant—by which we mean he shoots them until the end credits roll. It's one of the best first-person shooters ever made for a console and a better-than-fine reason to be an owner of an Xbox.



PENISON: TAHMOE \$49.99

ESRB RATING: M
DEV: BUNGIE
PUB: MICROSOFT

DEUS EX 2: INVISIBLE WAR

Greek literary device turned fine first-person shooter, *Deus Ex 2: Invisible War* offers players the opportunity to build a better hero and then shape his or her character by making moral decisions affecting the balance of play.

Biomedication alters protagonist Alex D to the point where he or she can become a crate-hurling brute, a computer-hacking robot, possessing whiz, a superquick thief, or just about anything else you want, letting players tackle the game in a variety of ways. A sharp story drops D into a place where cells are the soldiers in an invisible war and different factions vie for power in a world so dripping with intrigue, it deserves a venging out at random intervals.



PENISON: DAMAGE \$49.99

ESRB RATING: M
DEV: ION STORM
PUB: MICROSOFT

TOM CLANCY'S SPIDER CELL

Secret-agent man Sam Fisher is cooler than you are. He'll save the world while you're sitting there in your underwear wondering if you should microwave a burrito (you probably shouldn't). Stealth based and heavy on the gorgeous graphics, *Spider Cell* gives you the opportunity to use a wealth of gadgets in pursuit of peace on earth and goodwill toward men.



PENISON: DAMAGE \$19.99

ESRB RATING: M
DEV: UBISOFT
PUB: UBISOFT

TOM CLANCY'S RAINBOW SIX 3

For those who missed Rainbow Sixes 1 and 2, here's a recap: Shoot bad guys. Repeat liberally. Six 3 puts the player in command of a hardened four-man squad led by player-controlled Ding Chavez. You attempt to uphold the fine secret-ops tradition of storming into rooms, firing guns, and trying not to trip over the resultant corpses. Online play adds extra killing sweetness.



PENSION
DAMAGE \$49.99

ESRB RATING: M
DEV: UBISOFT
PUB: UBISOFT

STAR WARS: KNIGHTS OF THE OLD REPUBLIC

To be blunt, Xbox RPG Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic makes Star Wars: The Phantom Menace look like the Star Wars Holiday Special. KotOR's plot sweeps and surprises, rocks and rolls like a paper boat on the high seas. Brilliant and eminently fun, this is the videogame hands were made for. Buy two copies. At least.



PENSION
DAMAGE \$49.99

ESRB RATING: T
DEV: BIOWARE
PUB: LUCASARTS

TOP SPIN

The ball bounces gorgeously in Microsoft's online tennis epic Top Spin. The game features 16 real-world pros, including tennis player Pete Sampras and tennis celebrity Anna Kournikova, as well as a stunningly detailed character creation system and career mode in which players vie to where out ad space on their bodies to Nike, Adidas, and so forth.



PENSION
DAMAGE \$49.99

ESRB RATING: E
DEV: POWER AND MAGIC
PUB: MICROSOFT

CRIMSON SKIES: HIGH ROAD TO REVENGE

Ain't no peanuts or beverage service on this flight, but there's plenty of fantastical 1930's dogfighting action, either in solo play or with the more raucous and fun 16-player online options. As the unfriendly crimson skies finally fill with filth, hot lead, and bad feelings, the ensuing action falls squarely between nirvana and heavenly rapture—it's your call.



PENSION
DAMAGE \$49.99

ESRB RATING: T
DEV: MICROSOFT
PUB: MICROSOFT

XBOX LIVE



Microsoft's Xbox Live broadband service offers online play, downloadable content including new levels and characters, real-time chat, and the opportunity to annoy opposing players with special voice-masking technology. The starter kit (\$49.99) comes with a one-year subscription to the service, a headset, and a copy of the excellent shooter MechAssault. Doing online is a snap with a broadband connection—all you need is an Ethernet cable to link your Xbox with your DSL or cable-modem connection. Logging on to the service is as easy as selecting the Xbox Live option on a menu screen. Live-enabled titles, such as Crimson Skies: High Road to Revenge, NFL Fever 2004, Top Spin, Rainbow Six 3, and Dance Dance Revolution Ultramix, make the service worth using again and again. Upcoming titles such as Dead or Alive Online and Halo 2 ensure there will be no dearth of options in the future, either.

GRAND THEFT AUTO DOUBLE PACK

Rockstar showed two ultraviolent, ultrafun games into one ultranet package, but not before it added great new features such as improved graphics and customizable soundtracks. Picking up video hookers, running amok with a flame thrower, jacking cars, and plugging into the soothing sounds of Neil Diamond has never tasted so sweet.



PENSION
DAMAGE \$49.99

ESRB RATING: M
DEV: ROCKSTAR NORTH
PUB: ROCKSTAR GAMES

PROJECT GOTHAM RACING 2

The online-enabled Project Gotham Racing 2 is like some delicious gear-laden mana from heaven. Eight players can compete together via Xbox Live, driving on gorgeous courses that stretch from sweet home Chicago all the way across the sea to Yokohama. The well-loved Kudos point system rewards stylish driving, and players' scores can be posted online for ultimate bragging rights.



PENSION
DAMAGE \$49.99

ESRB RATING: T
DEV: BIZARRE CREATIONS
PUB: MICROSOFT

ARMED AND DANGEROUS

Join a dysfunctional band of miscreant heroes as they shoot things, blow crap up, wreck stuff, make amateur jokes, drink tea, and save lepers from certain doom. Interested yet? Then how 'bout if we told you this third-person action game features a shark gun, a portable black hole, and perhaps the most fun a human being can have with his pants still on. Unless you happen to live in Las Vegas.



PENSION
DAMAGE \$49.99

ESRB RATING: T
DEV: PLANET MOND
PUB: LUCASARTS



Coming in 2004:

- Half-Life 2
- EverQuest II
- World of Warcraft
- Breed
- Unreal Tournament 2004
- Ultima X
- Joint Operations
- Battlefield Vietnam
- Doom 3
- The Sims 2
- Freedom Force vs. The Third Reich
- Sam & Max 2
- The Movies
- Battle For Middle-earth
- Tribes: Vengeance

DC BOXY, BUT SAFE

Being a fan of the PC and its special group of games doesn't mean you're a dice-rolling dweeb or a complete graphics whore. No, being a PC gamer is more than that: It means you like to play with mice.

Really though, PC and console gamers found some common ground this year. Some of the biggest and best franchises out there made the leap to PC, including *Grand Theft Auto: Vice City* and *Halo*—even though *Halo* was originally a PC title before

Microsoft saw its potential for Xbox, and the original *GTA* made its debut on PC.

Some games, especially real-time strategies, are a better fit for the PC's control system and graphical detail. Let's face it, games just look better on a high-res monitor powered by the latest graphics chips.

So console gamers, let's agree. Both worlds have a lot to offer gamers. But if you come after *Half-Life 2*, there's gonna be some trouble up in this humpy bumpy.

IF YOU BUY ONE GRAPHICS CARD THIS YEAR...

... which one covers all the angles?

ULTIMATE



In the seesaw battle of graphics cards, it's tough to choose one over another. The ATI 256MB Radeon 9800XT (\$500) is a great card. While it's not as fast as Nvidia's flagship card, the 9800XT is fast enough. And if it's good enough for Valve's Game Newell, then it's good enough for us.

BUDGET



At around \$100, the Nvidia 128MB GeForce FX 5200 is the cheapest card with DirectX 9 support you can buy. If you're on a budget but still want a lot of bang for your buck, you can't get a better card than this. You can use the money you save to buy an air-conditioned mouse.

TRON 2.0

One of the year's most innovative first-person shooters is based on a 20-year-old movie license. *Tron 2.0* picks up the story of Disney's 1980 sci-fi cult classic and updates it with the latest technology. With its glowing corridors and huge spinning processors, running around inside a computer never looked so cool.



PENSON DAMAGE \$39.99

ESRB RATING: T
DEV: MONOLITH
PUB: BUENA VISTA GAMES

WARCRAFT 3: THE FROZEN THRONE

Expansion packs that add a few levels and a new unit or two are de rigueur for PC strategy games. But Blizzard's best-selling *WarCraft III* expansion offers more than just some new content; it adds entirely new single-player scenarios that play out like mini-RPGs.



PENSON DAMAGE \$29.99

ESRB RATING: T
DEV: BLIZZARD
PUB: BLIZZARD

HALO

PC gamers have waited years for Xbox's killer app to be ported back to the platform it was originally intended for. The result is a single-player experience that both lives up to the original and is fresh and new. But improved online and LAN multiplayer is why this must-buy title kicks major alien butt.



PENSON DAMAGE \$49.99

ESRB RATING: M
DEV: BUNGIE
PUB: MICROSOFT

RISE OF NATIONS

Strategy games come in two flavors: real time and turn based. *Rise of Nations*, designed by Brian Reynolds (of Sid Meier's *Civilization* fame), has the best of both worlds. The complexity of an empire builder and the fast-paced action of a good RTS clickfest are combined to make some great gameplay.



PENSON DAMAGE \$49.99

ESRB RATING: E
DEV: BIG HUKE GAMES
PUB: MICROSOFT

HOLIDAY BUYERS' GUIDE!

FREELANCER

Another long-awaited PC megagame (originally developed by Chris Roberts, the guy behind the classic *Wing Commander* games) finally saw the light this year. The end product is a bit different than the early looks, but it's an addictive, action-packed space-trader RPG nonetheless.



PENSION
DAMAGE
\$19.99
ESRB RATING: T
DEV: DIGITAL ANIVIL
PUB: MICROSOFT

IL-2 STURMOVIK: FORGOTTEN BATTLES

An excellent follow-up to the excellent eastern front-themed WWI flight sim, *Forgotten Battles* puts players back in the cockpit of the gangly Sturmovik and a whole slew of other new planes in a dynamic campaign over the more obscure—but just as deadly—battlefields of the war.



PENSION
DAMAGE
\$19.99
ESRB RATING: T
DEV: MADDODDX GAMES
PUB: UBISOFT

NASCAR RACING 2003 SEASON

Who says NASCAR is only for the dwellers of mobile phones? This final installment in the *NASCAR Racing* series by Peppas continues the tradition of exacting simulation and photo-realistic graphics that has been a hallmark of the series. Tallboys not included.



PENSION
DAMAGE
\$49.99
ESRB RATING: E
DEV: PEPPAS
PUB: SEIBERIA

HOMEBREW 2

If you're looking for a good old space opera with swelling orchestral music, spookily beautiful deep-space vistas, and a solid dramatic story, this is for you. As in the first game, you command a fleet of huge capital ships and nimble fighters in a quest across the galaxy in this fully 3D RTS.



PENSION
DAMAGE
\$49.99
ESRB RATING: T
DEV: RELIC ENTERTAINMENT
PUB: VIVENDI

GTA 3: VICE CIJ

Finally, the game that changed the face of videogames in the public eye has arrived for PC. You get better high-res graphics, the ability to play your own MP3s on the radio, and mouse and keyboard control, which makes running around like a madman a whole lot easier. It should be.



PENSION
DAMAGE
\$29.99
ESRB RATING: M
DEV: ROCKSTAR GAMES
PUB: ROCKSTAR GAMES

AGE OF MYTHOLOGY: THE TITANS

Age of Mythology is the continuation of the vaunted *Age of Empires* series of real-time strategies, only this time there are mythical beasts at your side. The *Titans* expansion adds units and buildings (as it should), but also huge mythological monsters. Hence the name.



PENSION
DAMAGE
\$26.99
ESRB RATING: T
DEV: ENSEMBLE
PUB: MICROSOFT

NEVERWINTER NIGHTS: SHADOWS OF UNDERTIDE

Those who didn't get enough *Dungeons & Dragons*-based RPG action can take the next 40 hours off and enjoy the new campaign in this, the first expansion pack for *Neverwinter Nights*. New monsters, classes, and skills, and two entirely new tilesets are here for the amateur modder.



PENSION
DAMAGE
\$29.99
ESRB RATING: T
DEV: TIBIAWARE
PUB: ATARI

MAX PAYNE 2

Stylish, gritty, bloody, and dark adjectives that describe this follow-up to the hard-boiled *Max Payne*. As before, you're a cop on the edge, but this time the game has better writing and an enhanced "bullet time" system for more cool slow-motion gunfights in back alleys.



PENSION
DAMAGE
\$49.99
ESRB RATING: M
DEV: REMEDY
PUB: ROCKSTAR GAMES

KILLER RIGS! (GRRR!)

GEEZER APPROVED
PC No. 1.



→ At more than \$5,000, Voodoo PC's F1 system better be damn cool.

The F1 rocks a Glycol-filled liquid coolant system that lends stability to the overclocked 64-bit AMD CPU and 256MB Nvidia graphics card. With a 21-inch monitor, dope speakers, and excellent tech support, the F1 will have you happily gaming away for some time.

GEEZER APPROVED
PC No. 2



→ \$5,000 is a bit steep, Dell's \$1,599 Dimension XPS system may be a better choice for you. With a 3GHz Pentium 4 CPU and 1GB of memory, this baby has what it takes to play the current crop of games. Be warned: You may want to drop a few C-notes on a graphics card upgrade.



PENSION SAVERS OLD SKOOL GAMES THAT RACK!

→ Many people often abandon their older systems once the new stuff rolls in, but one person's loss is another person's gain. Whether you're looking for an inexpensive little bundle as a present for a friend or you're trying to complete

your collection on the cheap, plenty of options are at the ready.

To help you organize your hectic holiday ho, ho, ho's, we've compiled a sampler of easy-to-find games for each of the major older systems.

NEO-GEO POCKET COLOR THE LITTLE HANDHELD THAT COULD, BUT DIDN'T

→ A great handheld system that never reached its full potential, the Neo-Geo Pocket Color is still home to some of the best portable games you'll find anywhere. Titles like *Card Fighter's Clash*, *Match of the Millennium*, *Samurai Showdown 2*, and *Metal Slug: First Mission* make this a keeper.

NEO-GEO POCKET COLOR

EB has two nifty deals for NGPC fans. One set features four games (*Puzzle Bubble*, *Last Blade*, *Sonic the Hedgehog*, and *SNK vs Capcom: Match Millennium Version*) for folks who already have the hardware (\$39.99). The other set actually includes the NGPC system and six games (*Pac-Man*, *Turf Masters*, *King of Fighters: R2*, *Samurai Showdown 2*, *Metal Slug: First Mission*, and *Fatal Fury F-Contact*) for the tidy price of \$79.99. It's a great way to experience a more eclectic side of gaming you might have otherwise missed. We can never get enough *Card Fighters*.

PENSION DAMAGE
\$79.99

ESRB RATING: N/A
DEV: SNK CORP
PUB: SNK CORP



PS ONE FOREVER YOUNG

→ Small and portable, you can take something like a billion games on the road with you if you pick up the optional LCD monitor. Also a great starter platform for young'un's.

PS ONE

Strange you don't have one yet, but we won't judge—you must have your reasons. At only \$50, the cute and compact PlayStation is a figurative steal. You can throw in an LCD screen for just \$50 more.



ESRB RATING: N/A
DEV: SCEA
PUB: SCEA

MADDEN 2004

Going on vacation but still need your pigskin fix? Send EA a Christmas card and say, "Thanks for making Madden for my PS1." Because you know they did it just for you. Believe it.



ESRB RATING: E
DEV: EA
PUB: EA

FINAL FANTASY TACTICS

If you dig strategy games and moggies (and who doesn't?), FFT is the game to beat on PS1. It'll keep you busy for a while and exercise your brain somewhat, too. Can't beat that.



ESRB RATING: T
DEV: SQUARE
PUB: SCENA

LOADED

We're reaching back on this one, but we still love *Loaded*'s simple, over the top (literally) shooting action. Skeleton cowboys and bazooka-toting clowns make for good times, and the price is right.



ESRB RATING: T
DEV: GREMLIN
PUB: INTERPLAY

NINTENDO 64

BUDDY, CAN YOU SPARE A CART?

→ It may never have been No. 1 on the sales charts, but don't let that fool you. N64 has more than enough classic titles in its library to keep you busy for months on end.

N64 SYSTEM

For less than the cost of a couple CDs, you can bring home an N64 and finally play all those classics you missed the first time around.



PENSION DAMAGE
\$29.99

ESRB RATING: N/A
DEV: NINTENDO
PUB: NINTENDO

BANJO-KAZOOIE

Say what you will about Rare's lack of originality and its banal character designs, but *Banjo-Kazooie* remains one of the top platformers for any system.



PENSION DAMAGE
\$11.99

ESRB RATING: E
DEV: RARE
PUB: NINTENDO

RESIDENT EVIL 2

Developed by Angel Studios, this port of Capcom's original *Resident Evil* features gameplay tweaks not found in the original. The game has full-motion video, too!



PENSION DAMAGE
\$8.99

ESRB RATING: M
DEV: ANGEL STUDIOS
PUB: CAPCOM

POKÉMON PUZZLE LEAGUE

One of the best puzzle games of all time, *PPL* is so addictive, there should be an FDA warning on the package. Multiplayer action is so good it's sick.



PENSION DAMAGE
\$8.99

ESRB RATING: E
DEV: NINTENDO
PUB: NINTENDO

DREAMCAST STILL KICKIN... SOMEWHERE!

→ Can you believe they still make new games for Dreamcast in Japan? We can. We just told you. One of the most underrated systems of all time, everyone should have a Dreamcast in their library.

DREAMCAST SYSTEM

We're not kidding when we say we might pick up a couple more of these things on the cheap, just to, you know, have around. That's how we roll.



PENSION DAMAGE
\$49.99

ESRB RATING: N/A
DEV: SEGA
PUB: SEGA

POWERSTONE

Notice how Capcom hasn't ported this to every other system in the universe, which means it's exclusive to DC! This one is better than the sequel.



PENSION DAMAGE
\$9.99

ESRB RATING: T
DEV: CAPCOM
PUB: CAPCOM

SOUL CALIBUR

This game reinvented 3D fighters, and that's saying a lot. Amazingly, the original *Soul Calibur* holds up in terms of both graphics and gameplay. Not bad.



PENSION DAMAGE
\$24.99

ESRB RATING: T
DEV: NAMCO
PUB: NAMCO

CHU-CHU ROCKET

The best party game on the system, unless you dig shaking maracas, and good luck finding those maracas. Shove mice into little holes. Good times.



PENSION DAMAGE
\$6.99

ESRB RATING: E
DEV: SONIC TEAM
PUB: SEGA

...HEY, IT'S OVER! NOW START YER WHINING!



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DAME GEEZER

SHE'S OLD!
SHE'S PISSED!

THE BETTER HALF (?) CHECKS IN WITH SOME MATRONLY ADVICE...

→ "Uh, hi there, Mrs. Geezer. Is Mr. Geezer at home?"

No, he isn't. Whaddya want? And make it snappy! My favorite TV show is on—Jackass—and I need to get myself into my chair ASAP, before I miss Steve-O getting hit in the 'nads with a hammer.

"Whoa, OK, we'll just get go—"

Don't know what you want with that worthless old ninny of a husband of mine, anyhow. The old coot can't even remember his own first name anymore, let alone say anything intelligent to you kids. Not that you'd understand it anyway, from the looks of ya. Y'all look like you just pulled up in the Dummy Bus. Especially you there in the back—the runty looking one in the SSX shirt! Lift some weights, boy! Ya got yourself a pigeon chest! Now, go on—git! All of you! Mr. Geezer's somewhere else in the magazine this month and he doesn't have time for your nonsense here!

"But wait! Mrs. Geezer! Since he's not here, could we ask you a question instead?"

Maybe. Just hurry it up.

FROM WHERE I'M SITTING,
YOU'RE STILL A BUNCH OF BOYS

"Well...you're a woman, right?"

"Course I'm a woman, fool!"

Whaddya call these? Go on! Squeeze 'em! Seventy-five percent real!

"Whoa. Uh, it's cool, Mrs. Geezer. We believe you. It's just...we were wondering. How come chicks don't dig games as much as guys? Except for weaksauce crap like *Animal Crossing* and *The Sims*? It's like, there's not even any girls in those games!"

Now, you see, this is why most of you are gonna be virgins until you're 36, at least! Y'all don't understand nothin' about nothin'. You think "shooting" things in videogames makes you a tough guy? You think some games are more manly than others? I got news for ya. In the eyes of most people, you're all a bunch of fruitcakes. You think Alexander would have been The Great back in the day if he sat in front of the TV fiddling with a game controller and stuffing Cheetos into his fat face, rather than getting out there on his horse and kicking real Macedonian ass? No sir! Now, that there was a serious hunk of beefcake! Just like that young Russell Crowe

fella! Now look at me—I'm gettin' all flush here!

Listen. Lemme tell ya about men. A man is someone who ain't afraid of showing his feminine side now and then. I don't mean anything nasty or weird like putting on my underthings and a tiara and prancing around the living room like a ballerina. Mr. Geezer keeps trying to do that when I'm not around, but if I ever catch him at it, I'll whack him on the head!

What I mean is, a real man isn't afraid to play so-called "kids games"

or "girl games" like *Animal Crossing* or *Mario Kart* or *Dance Dance Revolution*. Ain't nothin' wrong with bein' playful, or showing you know how to move. Just be a man when it really counts—and take out the garbage and do the dishes once in a while—and that's how you'll get yourself a woman!

But go on now! Scoot! I can see y'all aren't listening. Go shoot your digital guns at each other! I give up. It may be a man's world here in 2003, but from where I'm sitting, you're all still a bunch of little boys. **→**



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Intense Violence



PlayStation®2



eidos

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PAGE 47: //NOH //TECHNO //XBOX REVIEW

WORLD-EXCLUSIVE XBOX REVIEW

NINJA GAIDEN

WE WENT TO JAPAN...

To be the first on the planet to play Tecmo's blood-spattered ninjafest to the end! Wattaaaaaah!

PAGE 78: //NOH //CLANCY //XBOX REVIEW

SMOKE 'EM IF YOU SPOT 'EM!

RAINBOW SIX 3

Knock-knock! Who's there?

Flash. Flash who?

Flashbang!!! Yeeeeaaaaahh!!



LAFF RIOT!

ARMED & DANGEROUS

REVIEW: THE MOST FUN YOU CAN HAVE IN THE ENTIRE UNIVERSE! P.49

PANDORA TOMORROW, TOORAY!

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